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IN LONDON TOWN.

IN LONDON TOWN.

A Novel.

BY

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“A WESTERN WILDFLOWER,” “IN THE ALSATIAN MOUNTAINS,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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IN LONDON TOWN.



CHAPTER I.

THE country about Broodleigh was looking its summer best. The June roses were in all their cream and pink and crimson beauty. A long row of virgin lilies, the stateliest flowers that bloom in the purity of their whiteness, lifted their shining heads above the low terrace wall. In the sounds of the tender fresh leaves murmuring in the light wind; in the songs of the thrushes and black-birds, now in their height of summer song; in the scent of the many flowers

in the garden ;—the glory and the beauty of the shortest, sweetest time of the whole year was shown forth. Summer is long in coming, swift in going ; its sweetness rests but as a breath upon the land ; no sooner is its tender beauty reached than it begins to fade into autumn decay.

Mrs. Everest with her adopted daughter, as she loved to call Fanny, in the Rectory garden at eventide, felt the beauty that lay around her, and felt, too, its fleeting nature.

“ We must have David home,” she said.

Fanny stooped to pick a flower, and stuck it in her sash.

“ It will be very pleasant to have him back again,” she said. “ It seems so quiet here without him.”

“ Yes,” assented his mother, with a sigh ; “ David has very good spirits. So had his poor, dear father. I often think, Fanny dear, that David has not quite

such a serious way of looking at things as he ought to have. He does not seem to have any sense of responsibility about him."

"David is certainly not very serious," said Fanny; "but perhaps his spirits are too good to allow him to be."

"Ah, that is just it!" said Mrs. Everest, shaking her head. "Not that I wish to find fault with my own son. How should I? But I cannot help saying to you, my dear child, that what I most desire for David is that he should be subjected to a good steady influence, an influence that shall be gently, but firmly, exercised for his good. He is not fit to stand alone. I am sadly afraid, my dear Fanny, that he never attends any place of worship now."

"Dear mamma"—for so she had been instructed to call Mrs. Everest in her youthful days—"I think you must be mistaken. Uncle Theo told me only

yesterday that David had written to him about some ceremony that he saw in a church somewhere."

"Some papistical place of worship!" said Mrs. Everest, angrily. "I have no doubt his uncle's teaching has led him there often enough. I am sure," she added, with a deep sigh, "I have often enough regretted his taking that place in the Civil Service. London is full of temptations for young men." And Mrs. Everest took out her handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

They were at the end of the garden walk, and paused for a moment before turning back, as they often did, to look at the view of wooded hills that shut them in in this quiet green valley. The trees were in their deepest garment of green, and their shadows looked blue in the evening air. A bright stream went singing away into the meadows, and the sleepy cattle stood in it lazily swinging their tails and

waiting for night to send the flies to sleep. There was not a sound in the air, save the cawing of a few rooks in the tall elms beside the house, and the distant whistling of a lad as he tramped along the lane.

“He will be very glad to come back,” said the girl, in answer to Mrs. Everest’s remark; “and, mamma, I do not believe that he can get into any mischief, for he never could forget us. David is too kind to hurt us, I am sure.”

“Bless you, my dear girl,” said the elder woman, taking the girl’s hand in her arm, “you are a great comfort to me.”

Fanny kissed her, not effusively, but quietly and affectionately.

“That is what I like to be,” she said. And then they walked arm-in-arm, and silently back towards the house.

“I am afraid we ought to go in,” said Fanny, looking up at the sky. “There is a very heavy dew falling. My dress is

getting quite limp." And she looked at her light evening dress in some anxiety.

Mrs. Everest was not sentimental—her worst enemies could not say that of her—but it did cross her mind that a talk about her boy to the girl she knew loved him would not have come amiss on a fine, clear summer night. But Fanny was one of those quiet, decisive women who always manage to have their own way. Mrs. Everest had not fully recognized this quality in her yet, but even she had her glimmerings at times of the fact that Fanny was, upon the whole, quite as difficult to "manage" as David; but hitherto she had not allowed these feelings to be really recognised. Now she only said—

"Will you have a shawl, dear?"

"No, thank you, mamma. I think I will go in. Dew is not very wholesome to be out in. Are you not coming, too?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Everest; and she

followed Fanny into the house, with a dawning sense of being uncomfortable in so submitting.

David, in his reply to his mother's letter requesting him to take his leave and come home for a holiday, seemed strangely unwilling to do so. According to him, it was the best time to be in London; and he was very busy, and he would rather come back at Christmas.

Mrs. Everest was angry; and it is difficult to say what form her anger would have taken, had not a yearning, loving letter from his uncle overcome David's objections, and he wrote to say that he would be down on Saturday night.

Mr. Burney drove to the station to fetch him. Mrs. Everest had arranged for the one man of the domestic establishment to go, but the old rector suddenly asserted himself in an alarming manner, doubtless occasioned by his excitement at the prospect of getting his ally back,

and drove off single-handed, to the immense discomfiture of his sister, who had reckoned at getting David all to herself for the first hour or two on his arrival, and so properly preparing his mind for the duty he had been selected to perform.

This duty of course was to make love to Fanny. Not that she would have said so, but she would have worked towards it in an indirect manner. And now his uncle had him first after all, and they would get nothing but liturgical talk out of him for the whole evening.

However, she did the best she could under the circumstances, and sent Fanny out on the steps to receive them, standing back in the doorway herself with a handkerchief over her head, to express her fear of the cold of the evening air.

It is to be feared that the effect of Fanny in her pale blue dress, with a gauzy shawl thrown about her shoulders,

and her blonde hair fluffed about her head, standing just outside the shadow of the porch, was rather lost upon David, who was so absorbed in a conversation with his uncle that he continued talking to him while he got out of the carriage, and even remained with one foot on the step finishing his description of a certain “find” of his in liturgical matters, while Fanny stood waiting for him to shake hands with her.

“Well, David,” said his mother from the doorway, “so you have not even a word to bestow upon your mother and old playmate. It would be only decently civil——”

“My dear Fanny,” said David, taking the girl’s hand in his—it was a plump, pretty hand, and David held it firmly in his—“my dear Fanny, how well you are looking !”

“You did not expect to find her wasted away, did you, my lad—eh?” said the

old rector, with a beaming smile and a little chuckle of delight. "Ha, ha! not that we have not all missed you, my dear lad; missed you dreadfully."

David thought his mother had altered, though he did not say so, since she allowed this speech of her brother's to go unchecked and unproved; but it happened for once to coincide with her own sentiments, so she advanced and presented a chilly cheek for her son's salute, and said—

"So you have come back, after all, David, though you do not seem to have been very anxious to see us again."

"It is delightful to come back," said David; and they all went into the house.

Mr. Burney and David had a truly enjoyable evening. Directly dinner was over—for they dined late now in honour of Fanny's young ladyhood—and the ladies had gone into the drawing-room, David and his uncle rose, and fleeing from the

haunts of men, or, rather, women—for there were no indoor male servants at Broodleigh—fortified themselves in their stronghold, the rector's study.

“We will have tea brought to us here,” said the old man, rubbing his hands. “Oh, my dear lad, how glad I am to have you back again ! ”

“And I am just as glad to come,” returned David, looking at his uncle with affectionate eyes. “But, Uncle Theo, I must have a pipe. Bachelor lodgings have corrupted my youthful purity.”

The rector glanced towards the door.

“Your mother, my dear boy,” he said feebly ; but the very sight of his boy was enough for him to banish all other considerations. “My dear lad ! ” he cried again, “and you have grown so manly ! Bless my soul, and what a beard you have ! Smoke, of course, dear lad ; do anything you like.”

“I will square it with the mother,”

said David, filling his pipe ; “ and, Uncle Theo, we can’t possibly go into the drawing-room smelling of tobacco, you know.” And one of David’s eyelids drooped slowly over one eye.

“ Bless the boy ! Now, who would have thought of his being so deep ? ” chuckled the old man. “ London is the place for young men. Oh, Davie, why did we never think of this before ? ”

David merely answered by a smile of superb satisfaction, and, leaning back in his chair, entered into a long and particular account of a manuscript copy of the Mozarabic liturgy that he had lately been deciphering, and enjoyed his talk and his pipe as only a student can. As for Mr. Burney, he had never been happier in his life, and so emboldened was he, not to say excited, that he actually answered the summons to tea by the request that some might be sent to them in the study.

It was a long time coming ; but it did

come at last, very weak, very cold, and almost entirely creamless. After one sip they left it standing where the maid put it down ; and David went into the cellar and drew a jug of beer with his own hand, wherewith to refresh himself. The old rector desired no refreshment save the sight of his nephew's face and the sound of his dearly loved voice.

But this domestic mutiny could not go on for ever. Mrs. Everest and Fanny sat in the drawing-room together. They talked a little at first about David and his life in London, or what they supposed to be his life in London ; for David had volunteered but very scant information on that head. Then they discussed the temperature of the evening and their plans for the next few days ; and then Mrs. Everest nodded over a newspaper, and Fanny languidly unrolled her crewel work, but did not get much further with it.

“ Play something, Fanny,” said Mrs.

Everest, waking with a start, and becoming conscious that it was getting late.

Neither of them said, "Perhaps that will bring him in," but both thought it. But Fanny played, and even sang, with a well-taught, meaningless voice; but the captive was not to be lured that way. Possibly the Lady of the Rhine had been less carefully trained, but had more original capital in the matter of voice to throw into the music; anyhow, David came not.

"It is really getting towards bedtime," said Mrs. Everest at last. "I will go and see after them;" and go she did.

At the study door she stopped. There was a faint odour issuing from its sombre portals, an aroma so feeble, so diffused—for the study door was well-made, and well-fitted—that none but a well-trained nose could have detected the scent; and, according to the mandates of Broodleigh

Rectory, that odour was a forbidden thing within the garden and stable, much more in the house itself.

Mrs. Everest, with her handkerchief almost concealing her face, opened the door. The two conspirators started; they had forgotten all about her.

“May I ask,” she inquired in her most distant and freezing manner, “why Fanny and I have been obliged to pass the evening alone?”

“Thought you wouldn’t like the smell,” said David, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and placing a chair for his mother. “Hadn’t you better shut the door,” he added, as she remained standing in the doorway; “it might get into the rest of the house.”

Mrs. Everest turned upon him perfectly pallid with rage.

“Did you come back to insult me?” she asked fiercely.

“You asked me to come,” said David,

gently. "Look here, mother, I shall not smoke in the rest of the house; but Uncle Theo does not mind it here. I am sorry if it annoys you; but, you know, a bachelor living alone must do something to amuse himself."

"You had your books!" she retorted. "You always professed to like them when you were here, and were asked to do anything else. But I might have known you were not fit to be trusted, that you would be sure to pick up some abominably filthy habit like this, if you were left to yourself. After all the trouble I took about that appointment for you, you come back ten times worse than when you went away. I have no patience with you!" And to show that she had not, Mrs. Everest retreated, and banged the door after her.

"Poor mother, I did not think she would be so vexed," said David, tranquilly, as he filled another pipe. "But she will

come to it in time. Eh, uncle? But the pipe is a grand invention. I wonder," he added, with a sly look of mischief in his eyes, "that you never took to it yourself?"

"Well, I—before your mother came—at least, when I was a young man, I did," said Mr. Burney, shyly. "I remember I found it very soothing."

David got up hastily, and began searching in all his pockets.

"I have got a new one somewhere," he said. "Here it is. This is 'Light Returns,' but I have got some 'Wills's' somewhere; which will you have? I can recommend the 'Three Castles.'"

The old man smiled, shook his head, but took up the pipe and examined it in an absent sort of manner; looked at the tobacco, smelt it, then put the pipe on his knee; presently, in an absent manner, filled it, sighed, shook his head, sighed

again, and contemplated the briar root thoughtfully.

“Thank you,” he said, as David struck a match, and handed it to him; “thank you, my dear lad.” And peace and sweet contentment held a decorous revel in Broodleigh study that night.





CHAPTER II.

DAVID was up early the next morning, and out in the garden before breakfast. Perhaps there are few things more delightful than a stroll in a dewy summer morning in a sweet, old-fashioned, many scented garden, after one has been spending the spring months in London. There is something almost bewildering in the freshness and light and beauty, the absence of all London sounds and smoke, the life and light and colour that are around one, instead of the smoke and dirt and bricks of a roaring city. David was not a great lover of flowers; he had never gathered a bunch for his own delight in his life; but

he liked them collectively, and he liked them growing. A rose-bud in his coat gave him no pleasure, a mass of golden banksia outside his chamber window, or a great field of poppies, or a blaze of holly hocks, were a delight to him. So when he climbed in through the dining-room window to breakfast, he had enjoyed his uncle's garden to the full, though he brought no floral offerings to present to his mother and Fanny.

Mrs. Everest had slept upon the smoke question, and though that process did not ordinarily lead to a commutation of the sentence of the night before, on this occasion it produced a good effect. She received her son even with some sort of cordiality, for had she not heard him say as she entered the room—

“Are the lawn-tennis nets available, Fanny? We might have a game as soon as the grass is dry.”

So she kissed him, and told him that

he was looking pale, but country air would soon set him right ; and then sat down and poured out the tea, without even an allusion to his crime of the night before. Truly, the ways of women were incomprehensible to Mr. Burney, and if he had not long ago given up the riddle as hopeless, this last manifestation would have driven him to the verge of despair before he would have puzzled it out.

So they all had a very pleasant meal, and David and Fanny played lawn tennis afterwards, and Mrs. Everest sat in the drawing-room window and made a pretence of sewing, but was fully occupied in looking at them and thinking that, after all, there was much to be thankful for in this life, and Fanny would cure David of smoking if *she* could not.

David enjoyed his game. Lawn tennis on a fresh summer morning, in a sweet old garden, with a nice looking girl opposite, who knows how to manage her

racket, may surely rank among the pleasures of life, especially if the last eight months of that life have been spent in London.

Fanny could play lawn tennis very well. She had had plenty of practice all the spring with a girl friend who had been staying with her, and she was a girl who was naturally inclined to games. Being of a fair height, healthy, and with good strong limbs, she was able to play without too much fatigue. She was not precisely graceful in figure, being somewhat heavily moulded about her joints, with a rather greater length of body than was quite in proportion to her legs—a common defect with large, light-haired women ; but she was fairly active, and had been well-trained in ladylike behaviour, so she was never quite awkward, though never quite graceful. Her face was more attractive than her figure.

David, having arrived at the conclusion

before mentioned, that girls were, after all, moderately interesting, looked at his companion that morning more than he had ever done before in the course of his acquaintance with her. Lawn tennis is naturally better for the display of the figure than of the face, so Fanny's figure chiefly occupied David's attention. He came to the conclusion that it was too thick, though he omitted to account to himself why he did not admire a thick figure—some people do. Perhaps he had, quite unconsciously to himself, set up a pattern female figure in his mind that others should be judged by; if so, it was a very slim, childish figure, long limbed, slender shaped, delicately moulded at the wrist and ankles. Fanny's ankles were not delicate. David saw them occasionally, and came to the ungallant conclusion that he did not admire them.

But when they finished their games and went and sat in the arbour at the end

of the walk, things were a little better. Fanny's face was flushed, and flushed in the pretty way that fair people's sometimes can be—the cheeks rosy, the eyes bright, the forehead of a delicate white. Her hair had become loosed from its too precise plaits, and hung a little loosely over her brow. As to her eyes—blue eyes—will not any girl's eyes look sweet and bright and pretty when she has been playing any game, no matter what, with the man she loves, and who she believes will love her?

There was a little table in the summer-house made of logs of wood fastened together, and admirably adapted to upset everything that was put on it. David leant his folded arms upon it, and looked attentively at his companion.

“You are looking very sweet to-day, Fanny,” he said. “Everything is very nice to-day, I think.”

Fanny blushed and looked down, but

her eyes were very bright. David had never said anything like this to her before.

“You are looking so kind,” pursued David, in that low, tender voice of his—“so kind that, I am sure, you will not have the heart to refuse me one little request.”

Was it a little request? Fanny looked up, and taking her hat off smoothed her hair with her soft white hands, and then laughed, a little nervously perhaps. But David did not notice that; he was fingering something in his pocket.

“Dear Fanny,” he said, and it is impossible to write how tender and seductive his voice became—“dear Fanny, I am sure you are too kind-hearted to object to my smoking.”

And he drew his pipe out with one hand, while he laid the other upon hers that was lying on the table. He looked at her while he spoke, and she looked at

him. Perhaps something in her eyes told him all was not quite right.

“You won’t smell it in the open air,” he said. “I would not ask you indoors, of course. Won’t you, Fanny?”

“Oh yes,” she said, with a smile; for his voice had sunk to its most plaintive tone. “I—I don’t know that I altogether dislike the smell,” she added, with a blush and a laugh.

“You are an angel,” said David, decisively, immediately releasing her hand and proceeding to fill his pipe. “Fanny, I never before appreciated the immense stock of noble qualities you have in reserve. I knew, as everybody does, the ones that lie uppermost, but I never knew before how you could be depended on for an emergency. Now you are my ally, I fear no one, not even my mother; for you, Fanny, can do anything with my mother.”

“Oh no,” she said, with a little laugh; for she was very happy.

David and she had never had any little confidence together before ; this was something like a secret understanding between themselves alone. It was very pleasant.

“ Oh yes,” said David. “ Now, Fanny, you must be my friend in this, as you are in everything ; you were always a kind little soul, you know. Now I am going to let you into an awful secret. Stay, first you must swear not to reveal it, on pain of—— Let me see, I haven’t such a thing as a Bible about me ; have you ? ”

“ No,” said she ; “ and I would not take an oath upon it if I had, if that is what you mean.”

“ Ah, well,” said David, puffing at his pipe, “ the honour of the house shall be placed in your hands. What white hands they are ! Were they always so, Fanny ? I never noticed them before.”

“ You are very rude,” she said, folding them in her dress, but looking as though

she did not at all resent the rudeness, nevertheless. "Go on with what you were going to tell me, and never mind my hands."

"You know what happened in the study last night?"

"I know that mamma was angry. Oh, David, why did you do it?"

"Because I wanted to," said David, coolly. "Why do you eat your breakfast? But the point is this, Fanny. Poor old Uncle Theo—bless him!—used to like smoking as well as I do, and he has been obliged to give it up ever since we came here. Now that is a shame, and I want you to help in getting back his liberty for him. I want you to manage that he shall be allowed to smoke after I am gone."

"But, David, you are not going yet for a long time?"

"I don't know about that," said David, fixing his eyes upon a patch of sky that was visible between the rose leaves over-

head. "I must not take up all my leave now, or I shall have none left for Christmas. Won't you promise, Fanny? It will make me so much happier, if you will."

"Oh yes, of course I will," said Fanny, hurriedly. "But, David, don't think of going away yet."

"You are a dear, good girl," he said, looking affectionately at her. "Now my mind is easy about poor, dear old Uncle Theo."

And Fanny's mind was easy, too; and as for Mrs. Everest, when she saw them coming up the garden together laughing and talking, and noted David's serious air and Fanny's brightness, she felt easier than she had felt for many a month. So all seemed going well at Broodleigh Rectory.

David had not overrated Fanny's influence with his mother.

"Dear mamma," she said to her, as

they went upstairs to dress for dinner that evening, "David has been talking to me about his smoking. You know it is not at all an unusual thing for a young man to take to when he lives in lodgings alone."

"It is a disgusting habit," said Mrs. Everest. "It leads to drink, and is vulgar and demoralising in its influence."

"Not vulgar, surely, dear mamma. So many gentlemen smoke; and David will not smoke in the house, except in the study. Would it not be better to say nothing about it for the time?"

There was something in Fanny's voice as she said the latter words that caused Mrs. Everest to look at her. Apparently she was pleased by what she saw in the girl's face, for she kissed her, and said—

"You shall decide for him, Fanny. If you do not object to his smoking, neither will I."

"I told him I did not mind it," said

Fanny, demurely. So that difficulty was settled.

“David,” said Mrs. Everest, as she rose to leave the dinner-table, “if you smoke in the garden this evening, do not take the path that leads beside the drawing-room windows ; in any other part of the garden it will not matter.”

“Certainly, mother,” he said, as he opened the door for her ; and he looked gratefully at Fanny as she passed out, and even touched her hand with his for a moment, in token that he understood who had wrought this pleasing change in his mother.

Several days passed amicably enough. David played tennis, and walked with Fanny, and talked to his uncle, and sauntered about in all his old haunts, and did nothing, and enjoyed doing it as only a lazy man can, and had a regularly good time of it altogether, until the receipt of a letter in a feminine hand.

This same letter gave a great deal of anxiety to Mrs. Everest. Fanny did not know of its existence, for she happened to be in the garden when the post-bag came in after breakfast ; but Mrs. Everest saw it, and asked her son who it came from.

“It’s about some Museum work, I fancy,” he said. “There is an old patriarch who lives in the same house that I do, who goes there every day, and asks my help sometimes.”

“But this is a lady’s handwriting,” said his mother.

David took out the envelope and looked at it.

“So it is,” he replied. “Probably his daughter wrote it for him.”

“Why don’t you read it?” she persisted.

“Oh, it will keep,” said David, coolly. And he sauntered out of the room and joined Fanny upon the lawn.

“I don’t see why the man’s daughter should write to David, or even direct the letter,” mused Mrs. Everest. “If he had not gone off to Fanny, I should have thought there was something in it. As it is, I must keep a sharp look out, for things have been going so very well lately.”

David suddenly disappeared about the middle of the morning. Fanny went indoors to get a parasol, and when she came out again David was gone. Mrs. Everest, on whose mind that letter lay very heavily, was rendered uneasy by this, and strolled round the garden in search of him ; but he was not to be found.

A little copse lay at the back of Broodleigh gardens. It was on the slope of the hill, a place of ferns and moss, low growing birch trees, a few weather-beaten pines, and some broad-spreading beeches. It was very cool and green under the shadow of the leaves, and the mossy stones hid treasures of tender

ferns and flowers in their hollows. Scarcely anybody ever came there, for there was no regular path through it. It was merely a bit of waste land that had somehow escaped the cultivator's hand, and been allowed to remain wild and beautiful. It sloped gradually down to a field on the other side of the hill, and a little clear brook leapt between its stones to join a still, reedy river below.

It was here that David read his letter, lying on the moss and last year's beech leaves that lay thick under the smooth stems. It was not a very long letter, but it gave him a good deal of reading, nevertheless.

“DEAR MR. EVEREST (it began),

“You made me promise to write to you, so I do so, though I might have done so if I had not promised, because I am very angry with you—worse than angry; very much hurt. You have been helping

my father and all the time pretending to be my friend, and never told me a word about it. That was very cruel of you, and not fair or right. I tell you everything, and have no secrets from you. I should not consider myself your friend if I did not, and you have not done the same to me, therefore you cannot really be my friend. I am sorry for this, for I have no other, and friendship is very pleasant.

“Yet on second thoughts I am not sorry. I had no right to have what so many thousands have not, and this comes as a punishment for enjoying myself while others are suffering. I thought you were dealing fairly with me, but you have not been doing so, so we never shall be, and never have been, true friends. I have made my father tell me what you have given him, and have told him that I will not be bound by him any longer. I will work, I will do something, if I only sell

flowers in the street, or become an artist's model. I do not care what it is, but I will never bear such an insult again. He is very angry, and says I am going to disgrace my family. I can never drag its name so low as it has been dragged, for I will never accept as charity what is every one's right to have, and I will work for it—if needs be, fight for it; but I will drown rather than receive yours or any man's pity and alms.

“FIAMETTA THOROLD.”

David read it a good many times, and could his mother have seen his face as he did so she would have considered that things were very far from being right from her point of view.

“That's a pretty state of things,” he said to himself, as he folded the letter and put it in his pocket again; “a very nice comforting sort of letter to receive. The combination of child and firebrand

is curious. An artist's model, indeed! Good God! Miss Hatchard will never let her do that. I must go back to town and see about it, or she will get into the most awful mischief. Just as I was having such a jolly time here, too! What a plague women are!" and David rose slowly from his recumbent position and walked back towards the house. Somehow it did not occur to him, as he meditated on the folly and inconvenience of womenkind generally, that really there was absolutely no occasion for him to rush back to London because a girl who lodged in the same house with him threatened to get her own living. Why should it concern him that Fiametta was unhappy or reckless? It was no affair of his. David made up his mind to go back with never the shadow of a doubt as to the wisdom of his proceeding, but he said nothing about it at lunch.



CHAPTER III.

“FANNY and I are going up to the hall this afternoon. Will you come with us, David?” asked Mrs. Everest during luncheon.

“Yes,” he answered. So that matter was settled, and the ladies went away to prepare for their walk.

“You are not out of health, my dear lad?” inquired Mr. Burney, affectionately, as the door closed after Fanny. “You don’t seem quite—well, quite in your usual spirits.”

“Nothing is the matter,” said David, smiling. “I was only thinking, Uncle Theo.”

“Oh yes, yes,” said the old man. “We

are in a difficult place now, David. The question is, how did that 'Ave in ævum' get into both the Mozarabic and Salisbury Canons? The Roman wants it, and so does the Ambrosian, and of course the Gelasian does not go so far. Yet you say you found it in a Flemish manuscript of the fifteenth century. Now, if that was really the Use of a Flemish diocese, it is most important, and points to Gallican survivals."

But for once David was not thinking of Mozarabic Canons.

"You will come too, Theophilus?" said Mrs. Everest, as she and Fanny came down fully equipped for their walk across the fields to Fanny's home.

"Eh! Oh! Yes, dear me, of course," said the rector hurriedly, somewhat astonished at the invitation, or rather command, for his sister was not in the habit of requesting his company during her walks or drives.

So they all set out together. David would have walked with his uncle, but the "general" of the expedition prevented that in no time by sending him off to gather a rose for Fanny to wear, and then she and her brother walked on together, and she entertained him with an account of the latest iniquities perpetrated in the stable and kitchen—matters of deep interest to a liturgical student, of course.

The walk across the fields, with the fresh green woods upon their borders, and a dim perspective of wooded hills becoming bluer in the distance, was very beautiful on that still summer afternoon. The moving shadows cast by wandering clouds lay like strips and patches of blue from the sky upon the hollows of the rounded hills. Tall foxgloves reared their crimson heads upon the outskirts of the woods, and long sprays of wild roses festooned the hedges. David thought of

the dusty park and the roaring streets, the clouds of vapour and the miles of houses, and sighed.

“I am afraid you are tired, and would rather not have come,” said Fanny.

“No,” said David; “I like this walk. I only sighed to think of going back to London.”

David would have been astonished had any one told him that what he said was untrue. He believed he was speaking the truth, but, so little do we know even our own thoughts, he was not. He sighed because he thought of Fiametta and her circumscribed life, her narrow enjoyments, her blind, misdirected energy, her angry beating of herself with her wings as an imprisoned bird might do. He was not thinking of his own going back at all, yet he answered Fanny, as he believed, honestly.

“But you are not going yet?” she said.
“You have two or three weeks more.”

“I must go back,” he said. And then for the first time it occurred to him that he would have to give some reason for his doing so, and that his real reason would be treated with contempt; moreover, he felt that it would be impossible to give it. He shrank from speaking of Fiametta to any one, most of all to his mother. He dreaded to think what she might say of her. He instantly resolved that he would tell no one.

“Not at once?” Fanny asked, with some dismay in her voice; for he had paused, and continued lost in thought.

“Holidays cannot last for ever,” he said lightly. “I am a working grub now, Fanny, and you are a gay butterfly, so you must not tempt me from my duties.”

“I do not see that you need have any,” she answered. “Nobody wishes you to go to that horrid London.”

“Horrid London! Wait until you

have had a season there, and then see if you will call it horrid London."

"I don't want a season there; I would rather live in the country. Oh, David, I did not think you imagined I cared only for gaiety!"

"Nor do I," said David; "and you are quite right. London is very horrid when compared to a house like this."

They had come to the hall, and were standing in the porch as he said this. His uncle heard him.

"Eh, Davie — London? Yes, yes; London may hold larger houses—it does, of course, but none nicer than this, none so quiet, none so peaceful."

"Just so," said Mrs. Everest, assenting for once to her brother's statement. "Fanny might indeed go farther and fare worse;" and her maternal eyes rested approvingly on the pair before her.

Fanny blushed and looked down. David, unconscious of the *double entendre*

of his mother's speech, laughed and said Fanny was a lucky girl, and the hall was a beautiful place, and then they all went in together.

There was not very much to be seen inside. Rooms draped in brown holland are rarely interesting, except to good housekeepers. Fanny and David soon had enough of them, and strolled about them a little dejectedly, until they came to a pretty little room leading into a tiny conservatory. This was daintily furnished, and had books and pictures on the walls, and in it were a piano, and needlework, and other evidences of womanhood and habitation.

"Why, whose room is this?" asked David, stopping at the threshold.

"Mine," said Fanny, smiling. "Won't you come in? Mamma thought I might use it. It was poor dear mother's, you know; but as I had no sitting-room of my own at the Rectory, mamma had this

arranged for me, and we often come here. It makes a nice change."

" 'A bower!' " said David, seating himself; " 'very neat, very airy. Plants, you observe—hyacinths' (don't see any though), 'books again, birds. Such trifles as girls love are here. Nothing more. Those who seek heartless splendour, would seek here in vain.' "

"I don't think you need laugh at me, David," said Fanny, rather displeased. "There is nothing to laugh at in my having a sitting-room."

"Nothing on earth, my dear girl. I was only quoting the immortal Pecksniff. You are not well up in your Dickens, Fanny."

"Fanny dear," said Mrs. Everest, entering at this juncture, "will you take my brother to see the poultry-yard?"

"Isn't Uncle Theo rather tired?" suggested David, taking fright at his

mother's evident intention of administering a homily during their absence.

The poor old rector looked longingly at the sofas and easy-chairs. He was very tired.

"No, not at all," snapped his sister, in so decisive a manner that he merely bowed his meek head and followed humbly after Fanny.

"Now, David," said his mother, settling herself comfortably in an easy-chair, "I want to have a little talk with you."

David leant back in his corner of the sofa, and made up his mind for a bad time. He knew that something had been in his mother's mind all day. Indeed, for several days he had observed symptoms of an approaching crisis, so he resigned himself to the inevitable, and put as good face upon it as he could.

"All right, mother," he said; "I can be 'spoke,' run up your signals."

"You are extremely disrespectful, but

that I am accustomed to, David. It shall not prevent my doing my duty. The time has come at last for me to speak. I had hoped," said Mrs. Everest, drawing out her handkerchief, "that I might have been spared this painful task. Any man possessed of only ordinary dutifulness and respect—any man, I say, who took even a decent interest in his mother's wishes and the domestic circle he has been brought up in, would have divined what I am about to say, and prevented my having this additional unpleasantness. But I have never experienced any consideration from my son, so why should I expect any now that he has reached man's estate, and glories—yes, David, glories, in flaunting his independence before my very eyes?"

"How did I flaunt?" asked David;
"I didn't know I possessed that accomplishment."

"I shall not bandy words with you,

David. In *that* accomplishment I should indeed be quickly excelled. Not until to-day did I believe that deceit was a part of your character. I have yet to learn many things about my son, I believe." Here Mrs. Everest put her handkerchief to her eyes, and David knew that she referred to his letter of the morning, but he said nothing and she continued. "But personal considerations must not influence me when the happiness of another is at stake. For myself, widowed, alone, of course my son's happiness is the one thing dear to me; but as far as *I* am concerned, I should never have spoken on such a subject. I trust I can bear what disappointments he brings me as a Christian should; but when another person is concerned, then I feel that my duty is to speak." And Mrs. Everest looked fixedly at her son.

"I am afraid I don't quite understand you, mother," he said gently, but with a very uncomfortable foreboding at his heart.

“No; I did not expect you would,” said Mrs. Everest, meekly. “I was prepared for that. Your uncle’s slightest whim you can comprehend, but not your mother’s dearest wish.”

“You have never expressed any,” returned David, still speaking quietly, though inwardly extremely annoyed, “except that I should go to London. I have done that.”

“Go to London!” repeated his mother with scorn. “Couldn’t you see why I wished you to go to London?”

“To get my own living, I suppose.”

“To get your own living! Oh, David, David! why are you so dense? Whom does this place belong to? Whose is that park? whose are those farms? Oh, David, don’t you know, might have known any time these two years, that Broodleigh Hall and three thousand a year might be yours any day?”

David rose and walked to the window,

and stood there looking out over the acres that his mother said might be his. He did not exactly believe her, yet somehow the recollection of the past fortnight prevented his altogether disbelieving her. Strange as it may appear, it was a totally new idea to him. He had never thought of himself as Fanny's husband and squire of Broodleigh. Youth is notoriously slow to comprehend the solid advantages of life that elders think so much about. David's dreams had never been of squire-dom and an easy dignified country life, plenty of money, and plenty of the good things of this world. The idea, now that it was presented to him, had its distinct advantages.

Perhaps few men were better fitted than David for leading an easy pottering country life. He could buy books and study them, write treatises on forgotten subjects to his soul's delight, pay for their printing, and add tome after tome

of useless pleasant knowledge to the world's libraries, and never get a penny for his labours, but be elected to the Society of Antiquaries, and divers others. He could live in the country, and have no need to bother about money matters. In short, he could do exactly as he liked and never be worried. The plan had its advantages, but it had one distinct disadvantage: he would have to marry.

"Fanny is a dear, sweet girl," said his mother, just as he had got to this point in his meditation. She had been watching him anxiously; perhaps she saw by his face when he had come to it. "A dear, sweet girl!"

"But I don't love her," said David, slowly, more to himself than to his mother.

"She loves you," said Mrs. Everest; and it was one of the few clever hits she ever made in her life, for that shaft went straight into David's heart. He feared

that it was true, and he told himself that if it were so he ought to have seen it and checked it before.

He made no answer, but stood looking thoughtfully out of the window. With a discretion rarely exercised, Mrs. Everest stole softly out of the room.

“Fanny, my love,” she said, meeting the girl in the hall as Mr. Burney and she returned from their aimless visit to the poultry-yard, “it is time for us to go back; David will follow at his leisure. He is going to look about the place a little.”

Fanny looked disappointed, but obeyed; and Mrs. Everest was unusually radiant the whole way home.





CHAPTER IV.

DAVID did not come back to dinner that evening. This was in itself sufficiently astonishing; but not perhaps so unprecedented as Mrs. Everest's making an excuse for her absent son, and not appearing highly incensed at his absence.

The old rector was very uneasy, and eat his dinner in wondering silence. Fanny was dull, and, it must be confessed, a little displeased. It was not very polite of David to desert her in this way; but Mrs. Everest was in good spirits enough for both of them, and more maternal than ever towards Fanny.

It was dark when David came back,

and he looked pale and tired ; but he only confessed to being hungry. But when food was set before him, he gave but an indifferent confirmation of his statement. He had gone straight into the study, and had had his supper there, and Mrs. Everest did not send for him to come up into the drawing-room ; but after Fanny had gone to bed, she came down and gave him an embrace, and an injunction to go to bed, and not stay up talking too late ; but not a word did she say relating to Fanny or their conversation of the afternoon. So for once David did experience a sentiment of gratitude towards his mother.

In truth, David was very much concerned by what she had told him. He had never dreamt of the possibility of such a thing ; and, for all his coolness and indifference, he was as shy as a girl over many things that intimately concerned himself. He had never given any particular attention to the subject of

love, for he had never felt any special interest in the matter. Now that it was brought before him personally, it made him feel nervous and uncomfortable; less agitated than a girl would have been under similar circumstances, but extremely uncomfortable, for he was inclined, in a vague, indefinite manner, to blame himself for having allowed such a state of things to come about.

For all his fancied distaste of women's society, David was very tender in his heart towards them. He regarded them somewhat as encumbrances, but nothing would have ever made him harsh towards them. Indeed, he was quite capable of making great sacrifices on their behalf, for he was ever ready to help them to the best of his power. His first thought, on reading Fiametta's piteous little letter, had been to go to the assistance of her cramped, sorely tried life. The sacrifice of his own enjoyment he will-

ingly made, and though he might grumble about it, he never even contemplated his withholding his help from her.

So when Mrs. Everest had told him that Fanny was in love with him, his first thought had been that he must marry her. It is only fair to him to say that he honestly thought more of her misplaced youthful affection than he did of her lands and money. Wealth was a temptation to him, as it is to most men, but for a time at least the thought of Fanny's love put her money out of ken. On the whole perhaps he would sooner have married her, had she been willing, without her being in love with him, for then at least he would not feel so oppressively that she gave everything and he contributed nothing.

After the first feeling of pity for her, and the first chivalrous desire to sacrifice his own feelings and take upon himself the duty of protecting and comforting the

weak woman who seemed to have selected him as her lord, no matter what his own inclinations might be, David felt that it was impossible for him to marry Fanny, to take her heart and her wealth, and equally impossible for him to leave her. It was in this uncomfortable state of mind that he returned to the house, and silently eat his supper, and smoked a large number of pipes afterwards, to, of course, the immense discomfiture of his uncle.

Mr. Burney had become dimly conscious at dinner that something was the matter, but as it was only shown by the ladies, and Mr. Burney never attempted to understand them, it did not concern him very much. But when David, his own lad, came back late in the evening as glum as a mute, and as unsociable as a pole-cat, then his mild astonishment was changed to dismay, and his wondering to an almost ludicrous state of anxiety.

“My dear lad,” he said at last, unable to contain himself any longer, as David sat and puffed at his fifth pipe in the same abstracted, moody way that he did at his first—“my dear lad, is anything the matter?”

“The deuce and all is the matter, Uncle Theo,” said David, rousing himself to speak cheerfully as he saw the tender anxiety in the old man’s eyes; “which is a polite euphemism for saying that women are the root of all evil.”

“Hum!” said the rector, rubbing his hands; “you have not been falling in love, have you, Davie, eh?” and Mr. Burney looked remarkably sly.

“The Lord forbid!” ejaculated David, fervently; then, seeing his uncle’s look of astonishment, said meditatively, “but I don’t know that on the whole it wouldn’t be the best thing I could do.”

“Eh?” said Mr. Burney. “Well, I don’t know, my dear lad; women”—and

here he looked cautiously at the door, as if he expected one of them might enter like an angel unawares—"women, my dear lad, are very extraordinary creatures."

"So extraordinary that they ought to be put in a glass case and kept for show," said David, sulkily—he was clearly in a very bad humour—"then a man might live in decent quiet and peace, and not be pulled two ways at once. Did any of the sex ever take a fancy to you, Uncle Theo?"

"Me! Oh dear, no!" cried Mr. Burney, in such evident alarm that David laughed, and that restored his good temper.

"Nor you to them?" he asked.

"Oh dear me, *no!*" answered his uncle, with even more effusion than before. "No, David; I never even thought of marriage. Perhaps if your mother had not been so kind as to come and look

after my house, I might—well, I might possibly have thought——”

“Of having a housekeeper; quite so,” said David. “Uncle Theo, do you think love-matches are a success?”

“I can’t say, I am sure,” said the rector, rubbing his chin slowly. “You see, I have had no personal experience, Davie.”

“Well, no, and the law don’t allow of any man trying to improve his mind a little in that way without binding him down to it for ever; and then your experience isn’t of any use, because you can’t change your condition.”

“But, my dear lad,” cried his uncle, in astonishment—“oh, my dear boy, you don’t mean that you have any of those dreadful modern ideas about loosing the sanctity of the marriage tie? Oh, Davie, you can’t mean that?”

“I haven’t any notions on the subject at all,” said David, yawning. “I wish one could introduce the system of pur-

chasing a substitute, after the manner of military service in some countries. I would willingly pay some impecunious person to marry in my stead."

"But, Davie," asked Mr. Burney, with unusual persistency for him, "my dear lad, why are you talking about getting married at all? I never heard you do so before."

"Well, I have had a sort of an offer," said David, dolefully. "It's a dreadful position to be placed in, for I don't see my way out of it."

"You don't say so?" cried his uncle, aghast. "Oh, my dear Davie, what dreadful people you must have got among in London! I never heard of so indelicate a thing!"

"It isn't exactly from the young lady herself," replied David, thinking that his uncle had unwittingly put himself in a position to give him some disinterested advice; "but, I believe, or, rather, I have

been told, that she is in a condition to say 'yes,' if I ask her."

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Burney, contentedly; "you have been sounding her relations, her father possibly, first. A very right and proper proceeding, Davie. Honourable and gentlemanly. Go on, my dear lad."

"Well, what would you do in such a case?" asked David.

"I? Oh, my dear lad, if I were in your place I should—— Oh, well, I hardly know. You see any engagement must necessarily be a long one. It is very difficult to decide on anything so important, Davie."

"Yes, a hundred things might happen in the course of a long engagement," said David, rather enjoying the situation; "but there would be no luck of that sort for me, for the lady is very well off, and we could marry directly."

There was such an expression of

absolute horror in the old rector's face as he heard these words, that David burst out laughing.

“ You don't congratulate me, Uncle Theo,” he said. “ Don't you think it a fine prospect for me ? ”

But to David's unutterable dismay, the old man turned away his head, put his hands before his face, and a low moan broke from him.

“ Why, Uncle Theo, dear old Uncle Theo, what is the matter ? It's all a joke, Uncle Theo. I wouldn't marry a queen if you didn't like it. Nothing on earth should make me do anything you did not wish me to do. Look up, Uncle Theo ! What is the matter ? ”

“ Oh, my dear lad,” cried the old man, seizing David's hands eagerly in both his own— “ oh, my dear lad, it would break my heart to see you stoop to marry any woman for her fortune. Davie, no gentleman could do it. It would be taking a

base advantage of some helpless woman, perhaps some ignorant girl. Davie, you could not do it?"

"But there is something else," said David, speaking for the first time quite seriously, and holding the old man's hands affectionately. "Remember that she is supposed to love me."

The eager light faded out of the old rector's eyes; he looked helplessly at his nephew.

"She must not be allowed to suffer," he said.

"That is just it; but, Uncle Theo, the question is whether it would not be suffering for her if I married her, and she found out afterwards, as perhaps she might—women are very sharp—that I did not love her?"

"So she might," assented Mr. Burney, feebly. "I believe women are very desirous of being loved in return. I don't see what you can do, Davie."

“Perhaps,” said David, musingly, as he got up and stood before the fireplace, looking into its empty grate, “it may be only a girl’s fancy. I believe girls do take fancies into their heads sometimes.”

“Is she very young?” his uncle asked.

“She is twenty,” said David, with a little flush.

“Ah! dear Fanny’s age,” sighed the old man. “Fanny, I imagine, might change her mind. I do not know; she is not a very changeable person. Still, she might; and all girls are not so quiet and steady as Fanny. Can’t you, can’t you,” he asked, looking anxiously at David—“can’t you *wait* a little while, Davie?”

“Yes; that is what I must do,” said the young man, turning away his face. He could not bear to have even this little deception with the old man who so loved and trusted him. “Yes, I will wait; but,

Uncle Theo, I ought to go back to London at once."

The expression on Mr. Burney's face was very piteous. David's going away was the worst thing the world held for him, as far as he could judge; but he only said—

"You must be the best judge of that, dear lad; you must do as seems to you best. I have every confidence in you, Davie."

"I need not go for a few days, perhaps," replied David, touched by the old man's exceeding pain—"a few days up or down can't matter much; and we must settle that question of the 'Ave in ævum,' if there is any answer to the conundrum."

So that affair was decided for the time, and David went to bed and slept soundly, and in the morning came to the conclusion that his mother had exaggerated matters, and he had worried himself very unnecessarily. Yet all the same he

blushed a very bright red as he shook hands with Fanny in the breakfast-room under his mother's eyes.

Mrs. Everest, by way of being a very astute diplomatist, and giving value to her prizes by rendering them slightly more inaccessible, kept Fanny by her side all that morning, and so David was left at liberty to do as he pleased.

His mother supposed he filled up his time by reading in his room. In reality he was writing a letter, and this was the letter—

“MY DEAR LITTLE FRIEND,

“For you are talking great nonsense, as you always have and always will if ever you presume to say such a thing again as that we are not friends. We always have been since we first met, and always will be until the time when you bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave, by your neglect of my precepts and example.

“Now, with regard to your working. Of course you shall if you like, but you must leave it to me to find something for you better than hawking flowers, or being an artist’s model (if you sit to any artist but Miss Hatchard, I will thrash him black and blue for his impertinence). A profession is not found in a day, and you really must promise me to wait until I come back, which will be within a week from this date; for I can’t have my dear little friend throwing herself away on doing foolish work, when she can do good and make a fine name for herself. Of course you will be angry at my saying this, and stamp about; but don’t tear this letter up, but show it to Miss Hatchard, who, I am sure, will approve of your waiting a few days.

“As to myself, I am enjoying myself very much here. I play lawn tennis (which is an amusement your superior soul would revolt against), take long walks, and

generally look after my mother and the girl who lives here, my uncle's ward. Having two women on my hands, of course I am pretty busy, and why I should trouble myself about you I can't conceive, except that I too have grown to love being miserable, and you can make me more so than anybody else. So, good-bye, for the present, because I should like to write some more, but I have learnt my lesson so well from you that I won't do so, and will make you miserable too by sending so short a letter. Therefore, good-bye again, and if you write such nonsense again, you shall be an artist's model, and I will paint your portrait; and if that doesn't cure you, nothing will, and you will be hopelessly incorrigible, which is what you are. So, good-bye once more, and imagine that you are scolded and kissed, and we are friends again.

“Yours most miserably,

“DAVID EVEREST.”



CHAPTER V.

AND how had Mr. Fowler's love affair been progressing lately? David's counsel had refreshed him very much at first; but when a few weeks had passed since his engagement, and he found no opportunity of communicating with his lady-love, he again became a prey to the bitterest despair. He did not dare to write to Nellie, for he did not know into whose hands the letter might fall, and he was also fearful of getting her into trouble if he did so. The only thing left to him was to prowling in a dismal manner about the vicinity of Weymouth Street, and to glance despairingly at the back windows

of the houses there, in the faint hope that Nellie's face might appear at her bedroom window.

This in itself was not a very cheering or hopeful pastime, and Mr. Fowler, by dint of neglecting his meals and lying awake at night, as a variety from this amusement, was reducing himself to an interesting condition of skin and bone, when chance, who seemed to have a special partiality for him, threw Nellie in his way.

Nellie was coming back from a class on political economy in University College one afternoon. The lecturer had been unusually long and prosy, and Nellie's pretty little head had nodded a good many times over her note-book. Nellie always took voluminous notes at lectures, by her aunt's desire; but as they were never decipherable by herself or any one else afterwards, it is doubtful whether she derived much solid good from the system.

It was a hot, languid afternoon. The class-room was crowded and stuffy, though the windows were open, for nothing seemed to come in at them, except smuts and street sounds. Nellie was bored and hot and tired ; so tired that even when the lecture was over she made no haste to leave, but waited until the rest of the pupils had gone, and then came languidly across the great bare courtyard in front of the college.

She was not looking where she was going, and would have passed Mr. Fowler in the street if he had not seen her there, for since his disappointment he actually walked about with his eyes open. “Nellie !” he cried. “Oh, Frederick !” the girl answered ; and political economy, professors, classes, and colleges, and maiden aunts, were all forgotten in an instant, and the world contained her lover and nothing else.

. They went for a long walk that after-

noon, to the Regent's Park. Mr. Fowler proposed it, actually called the idea into existence by his own unaided effort. He was certainly developing to a surprising degree. Nellie assented, of course. She would have assented to almost anything that afternoon that promised a respite from the stuffy streets and the dreary lectures. What they said on that afternoon under the drooping dusty leaves in the park need not be repeated here. Most people can imagine it for themselves; those who cannot do so would feel no interest in reading it.

It was the first but not the last of their walks in the Regent's Park. The amount of use that park is to the lovers of Bloomsbury is almost incalculable; it is the only spot within a moderate walk where any approach to solitude and quiet can be obtained. Mr. Fowler and Nellie used it a good deal—every afternoon, in fact, for more than a week. Then, it was

one Saturday afternoon, Nellie burst into tears as soon as they reached its dusty shades, and confessed to her lover that Cousin Tom had been bothering her again, and her aunt was urging her on in the same direction.

Mr. Fowler's wrath was magnificent to behold. He drew himself up to the very extreme of his moderate height, and glared through his spectacles at an unoffending urchin, who was not interested in their proceedings, in a way that he might have glared at Tom himself if he had been there. Moreover, he ventured to put his arm round Nellie's waist, a liberty he had never taken before, after a hasty glance to see that no one in particular was looking at them, and proceeded to comfort her as best he could.

Whatever it was that he said or did, it was very effectual, for Nellie dried her tears almost immediately, and they fell to talking with great gravity and earnestness.

“You will have many things to put up with, darling,” Mr. Fowler said, after a time. “I am afraid, after being used to your aunt’s nice house and servants, you will find lodgings very uncomfortable.”

“I suppose a house would be nicer?” said Nellie; “but, Frederick dear, surely if you can live in lodgings, I can.”

“B-b-but I am out a good deal,” explained Mr. Fowler. “I—I am afraid you will find it very l-l-l-lonely.”

“Not more lonely than a house.”

“Well, no; certainly not,” said Mr. Fowler, brightening. “I don’t know much about the other l-l-l-lodgers; but I believe there is a v-v-very nice girl at the top. But what I mean, darling, is, that we shall have so little m-m-money to spend, that I am afraid you will find life very hard for you. You won’t be able to go to entertainments at all; and m-m-many things that you are accustomed

to now. We shall even have to live very plainly, darling."

"I shall learn to cook," replied Nellie, promptly. "I believe one can make very nice things with next to no money, if one only knows how to cook properly. Oh, Frederick, I shall make you such beautiful little dinners!"

"But, my darling, I don't like your being turned into a c-c-c-cook, with all your accomplishments."

"But I *hate* my accomplishments, Frederick; and I should love to make nice little dishes for you, and darn your stockings. Oh, Frederick, do you wear your stockings badly?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Fowler, glancing at his feet, "w-w-what you call badly, darling. I know I am always getting new ones."

"Then we shall save in that," cried Nellie, enthusiastically. "Oh, Frederick, I believe your things will last twice as long if I look after them."

“ P-p-possibly, my love. Y-y-you are sure you won’t mind having so v-v-very little money to spend? One hundred and eighty pounds a year is not much for two people to live on, darling.”

“ Oh, Frederick, you don’t really mean that—— ”

“ M-m-my darling, it’s only you that I am thinking of. It’s the g-g-greatest possible happiness to me, I assure you. I—I—I never dreamed of being so happy, darling,” cried Mr. Fowler, rapturously; and for the next quarter of an hour nothing interesting was said, though neither of the parties concerned seemed to have a dull time of it.

“ But you don’t think it is very wrong? ” asked Nellie, at length. “ Oh, Frederick, aunt has been very kind to me!”

“ S-s-so she has, darling; but she has no right to interfere with your happiness now. If it were not for T-t-t-tom Marlow” —and Mr. Fowler pulled his forehead up

into a knot supposed to represent a scowl of dark and deadly malignity—"if it were not for that contemptible p-p-puppy, we could tell her all about it, Nellie."

"Yes," assented Nellie, with a sigh. "I hope it isn't deceitful, Frederick; but—but this mystery is a little nice, too; isn't it?"

"V-v-very nice," said Mr. Fowler, kissing her again. "We will tell her all about it afterwards."

"Well, not *all*," said Nellie, looking shyly at her lover. "I am sure I shall never have courage to tell her I let you kiss me before we were married, Frederick. She would consider I had disgraced myself for ever."

"N-n-no, she won't," said Mr. Fowler, sturdily; "f-f-for if she does, Nellie, I shall k-k-k-kiss her because she is your aunt."

And with this sentiment of Mr. Fowler it is high time to close this description,

to such desperation may the prospect of matrimony bring a moral young man. If anybody a few months ago had told Mr. Fowler that he would ever kiss a young lady in broad daylight in Regent's Park, and talk of saluting an elderly maiden lady in the same manner, he would not have had enough blood in his body to bring out the blush he would have considered suitable for the occasion. After this sentiment, nothing further could be expected of Mr. Fowler than that he should make a run-away match, which was precisely what he and Nellie were discussing at the time.

But nothing could be done without David's help. David, according to Mr. Fowler, was an epitome of the wisdom of all ages, and a perfect reservoir of common-sense and kindness. Indeed, so enthusiastically did Mr. Fowler speak of his friend, that Nellie rather feared she should rather dislike him than otherwise; it seemed impossible that any one man could

carry such a load of virtues without some corresponding vice to balance them. She recalled, with a shudder, Tom Marlow's testimonials, and decided in her mind that David was an objectionable person, until Mr. Fowler incidentally mentioned that a runaway marriage was more or less David's suggestion, and from that time forward Nellie began to think more favourably of her lover's friend.

David came back, after three weeks' absence, at least a week earlier than he was expected. He seemed rather gloomy, as if his holiday had not agreed with him. He grumbled at London a good deal, too, and found the dust, and the smuts, and the streets, and the air all far less agreeable than he had thought them before. He even found fault with the British Museum reading-room, and declared that it made his head ache; and when a student can say *that*, it of course means that something very bad is the matter.

Mr. Fowler was surprised at all this, but still more surprised when, on his modest request that David would afford him his moral support at the altar in the character of "best man," he was met by a flat refusal, and the information that he, David, would not have it on his soul to help forward such a thing as a marriage in any way.

Mr. Fowler was aghast.

"B-b-but you yourself s-s-suggested my m-m-marrying," he stammered forth.

"Then I was a blessed fool," said David; "and if it will be any relief to your mind to curse me, let fly at once; it will rather do me good."

"M-m-my dear Everest, I—I don't understand you."

"There's only one thing worth marrying for," said David, turning round fiercely in his chair, and staring hard at the little man before him—"only one thing, and that is money. Go and marry the aunt,

if you like, but not this girl without a penny."

"That," said Mr. Fowler, rising to leave the room, his gentle dignity roused at last, "is a matter I will not even discuss with you, or any man. Good night, Everest. I am sorry to see you so changed;" and he moved towards the door.

"Sit down," said David, peremptorily. "Fowler, do you really mean this? What are you going to marry the girl for?"

"Because I love her," answered Mr. Fowler, promptly.

"Ah! What about her?"

"She loves me, too," was the answer.

"Mutual accommodation, I see. Well, Fowler, I suppose I must see you through with it. Where are you going to live?"

"Here," answered Mr. Fowler, his eyes moist with pleasure. "Oh, my dear Everest, this is a great pleasure—your consenting, I mean."

“Don’t reproach me with it afterwards. Fowler, is your future wife a kind-hearted woman? I mean, would she pity any one who was in distress, or was unfortunate in any way?”

“Nellie kind-hearted!” cried Mr. Fowler, quite astonished at the question. “Why, she is the kindest, most sympathetic—why, the very sweetest, gentlest——”

“Ah, I see, I have come to the wrong house for inquiries,” said David, coolly. “Of course she is. Well, Fowler, if she is all you say, I may enlist her sympathies some day for some one; but I shall judge for myself first. Good-bye, old fellow.”

This was the only time David saw Mr. Fowler until the day before his wedding, for his time was very much taken up by trying to find some suitable employment for Fiametta. Until he was actually engaged on this quest he had no idea

how difficult it would prove; and the information of a totally new kind that he acquired was of a nature calculated to disgust and dishearten him. For the first time in his life David was brought into actual contact with the great army of sufferers who literally live on from hand to mouth, not knowing to-day where to-morrow's bread will come from.

Brought up in a country parish where the poor people were looked upon almost as the property and especial care of the well-to-do, he was completely astounded at the frightful distress that is so completely ignored and overlooked in our large towns. In Broodleigh, if a man or woman was sick, the Rectory and the larger farmers' houses were immediately applied to, and the sick person became their care. Here sickness meant isolation—nobody knew and nobody cared. There were hundreds ready to press into the vacant places, and the sufferers, living or

dying, were matters of indifference to every one except themselves.

Every possible employment for women seemed besieged by eager crowds of applicants, ready almost to fight, if need be, to secure the starvation wages that alone were paid for the lower forms of work. For really skilled hands in almost every trade there was a fair demand, but for mere labour that had received no very special training, the market was not only overstocked, but overflowing.

At last, after infinite pains and trouble, he succeeded in getting some of the coarser work connected with artificial flower-making, which Fiametta could do at home. It was wretchedly paid, so wretchedly paid, indeed, that by working from morning to night she could only earn from seven to eight shillings a week ; but she had the advantage of being able to work at home, and could thus avoid the unpleasantness of factory life. Per-

haps Fiametta would not have objected to going out to her work so much as David did for her; but he settled that point without even asking her opinion on the matter.





CHAPTER VI.

DAVID had been a good deal concerned by the change in Miss Hatchard's manner towards him since his return, for he could in no way account for it. He puzzled himself in trying to find out how he could have offended her, but could not recollect doing anything of the sort. He tried to propitiate her in many little ways, but nothing seemed to make any difference in her continued coldness. At last he determined to get at her through her art.

He knew that she was poor, and always had been so, but just at present he fancied, from a few words of Fiametta's, that she was unusually short of work. He had

brought back with him as a present from his mother a photographic album, containing portraits of herself and Fanny—Mr. Burney had never been subjected to the trying and often humiliating ordeal of photography. Mrs. Everest's birthday was approaching, and David considered that a copy of Fanny's photograph, done in oils, would be a suitable present for him to give her. Fanny had been so long an inmate of the house, that such a proceeding could scarcely be interpreted as a lover-like attention on his part.

Armed with this photograph, he accordingly made his way up to Miss Hatchard's studio one morning before going to his office.

"Come in," said Miss Hatchard, somewhat ungraciously, in answer to his knock. "It's you, is it, Mr. Everest? I thought as you went to your office before now."

"There is only one thing that could

insure my being at my office at ten o'clock in the morning," answered David, gravely, "and that would be my office coming to me. I don't approve of ruining my constitution by early rising."

"You won't ruin yourself, never fear," retorted Miss Hatchard; "it's more in your line to ruin other people, I take it. Now, Mr. Everest, I can't stop my work to talk to you. Time is money, that's what it is with me."

"I wish that was the principle adopted by the Civil Service," replied David, "then I should have, at least, a prospect of being able to earn the wages of a good mechanic in a few years' time. But what I came to you about, Miss Hatchard, was some work of yours, only you have made me so nervous I can hardly tell you about it. May I take a chair?"

"Yes," said Miss Hatchard, rather softened in manner.

"It may have occurred to you," said

David, "in one of your unoccupied moments, that I have a mother. Whether it has occurred to you or not, it is a fact, and not an uncommon one among men, I believe. In the course of nature she has a birthday, and I, being, as I am sure you must have observed, a very pattern of dutiful and obedient sons, desire to make her a little present on the happy occasion. It has occurred to me that the portrait of the young lady who has graced our humble home and shed a beam of—what do you call it?—fill in the blanks in your own poetic language—would be a suitable offering. Do you follow me?"

"You want the portrait painted of the girl you played lawn tennis with in your holidays, I suppose?"

"The very same. This is her photograph. Now, Miss Hatchard, will you do it, as large as life and twice as natural, and sue me for the damages afterwards?"

Miss Hatchard paused, and looked long at the photograph. She had never paused in accepting a commission to paint before, and this was one of the best offers she had ever had in her life.

“I couldn’t do it for less than five pounds,” she said, and not at all in the tone of a person who has received any kind of benefit from the person addressed.

“Done,” said David. “I shall not want it before the end of November, so you can take your time over it.”

“Well,” said the little artist, evidently struggling to keep back her native kindness from showing itself in her voice and face, and not succeeding very well, “I am much obliged for the order, and will do it as well as I can; but you mustn’t expect a first-class painting from me, you know.”

“Make it *like*; reproduce those features, them hair, they bangles,” said David, sentimentally. “That is all I ask.”

“What colour is her 'air?”

David stared at his questioner.

“Hum—colour? Oh, an ordinary sort of colour, you know, like most girls' hair.” Then, brightening up, he added, “But I can get my mother to send me a bit of it.”

“Oh, of course you don't know,” observed Miss Hatchard, sarcastically. “Better ask for a bit of her eyes at the same time. I suppose you don't know what colour they are either?”

“Blue,” said David, promptly. “I know they are blue; I have seen them.”

“Well, how else would you know?” snapped Miss Hatchard. “I'll go bail you've seen 'em.”

“I stake my life on that,” said David, solemnly.

“I dessay. Now about her dress?”

“My country calls me,” replied David, looking at his watch, “calls me in the most persistent manner, by reminding me

through my internal machinery that if I don't start soon I shall be too late for the beefsteak pie at the restaurant, where I take my humble meal at one—'plate of pie, pint of porter, bread; one shilling; no fees to waiters.' Good-bye, Miss Hatchard. I will turn the question of the dress over in my mind, and let you know again;" and David, with a low bow to Miss Hatchard, and a kiss of the hand to the photograph, went downstairs and out of the house.

"Well, if that ain't the very surprisingist young man," soliloquised Miss Hatchard, looking meditatively at the portrait of Fanny, "as ever I come across! You never can tell whether he's in earnest or not. But one thing is clear, he has given me a good order; not that I like taking it, though, either. Of course it's for 'im. I take it I can see through that there rubbish of 'is about 'is mother. He's going to marry er',

of course ! Oh, what deceivers men is ! And 'e a carrying on like he do with Fiametta—walks and talks, and I dunno what all, and a pretending to be so anxious to get her somethin' to do—to get her away from her par and me, that's what I believe he's up to. No, young man, you don't get that precious child out o' my sight, I can tell you !” And Miss Hatchard gave quite a vicious dab at her painting.

“Now, you know,” continued Miss Hatchard after a pause, and shaking her brush at the unoffending photograph, “that you've got money—an 'eap of it—and you ain't got nothin' else to recommend you, I can see, with your pale eyes and your know-nothin' face. You ain't a patch upon 'er”—looking at a portrait of Fiametta done by herself that hung upon the wall—“to look at, nor you ain't her beautiful ways, I can see ; for you are heavy built, and thick limbed, and small

waisted. You ain't none of her elegance ; for she is a growing elegant, only her frocks is agin her. If it weren't for that there young deceiver," mused Miss Hatchard, "the very first of that there five pounds should go in a new dress for her ; only it would make him admire her more than ever, and go faster after her than he is doing now, for she grows more beautifuller every day."

Miss Hatchard was right in one thing at least—Fiametta was growing more beautiful every day. Her creamy tinted face was perhaps a trifle thin for a girl's, but that was scanty fare and hard thinking, but the lines of her chin and cheek were faultless in curve and delicacy. Her lustrous dark eyes had always been beautiful, even in the days of their blankness and despair ; now they were not so restful as they had been, the old gloom would settle over them for a while, but every now and then it would break and

let some tender wistfulness take its place. She was very beautiful, very sad, still undeveloped in her rather square girlish figure, but giving day by day greater promise of exceeding loveliness.

When David had seen her first on his return, he was astonished at the change in her. It had never occurred to him that she was beautiful before, any more than that she was nearly a woman. Of course he immediately contrasted her with the woman he had just left, and Fanny came out badly by the ordeal. It gave him an uncomfortable feeling to put them together in his mind, and he did not do it again, any more than he compared Broodleigh with London. They were entirely distinct in his mind, and he kept them so. Fanny belonged to Broodleigh, Fiametta to London. He would never compare them again.

He was intensely interested in trying to find something that Fiametta could do

to earn her own living. It was not only that she was bent upon doing this, but also that he saw that there was every reason she should do it, both for her present and future happiness. Her father had changed very much of late; his fierceness was almost habitual to him, but was accompanied by such a pinched and eager look about his face that he must have been quite a terror to some of the mild old ladies who frequented the reading-room of the British Museum. It made David's heart ache to see him, his misery and despair were so fearfully depicted on his face and figure. David still helped him secretly; he could not see the man starve before his eyes. He dared not give him money openly, for fear of poor Fiametta's anger and indignation. He had no wish further to wring her poor bruised spirit. But he gave him copying to do at the Museum, work that he did not in the least require done, though it gave him

an excuse for alms; but as often as not this failed also.

“I have brought you your book,” the old man would say fiercely to him, as he came into the reading-room after his office hours. “Go and get some hireling to do your clerk’s work for you. My researches occupy my time. Do you think I am a slave to be driven to work for my bread? Get some one else to do your work. I have my own work, my own pleasures to attend to.” And the angry old man would fling the book down on the table and depart, muttering to himself; and so David’s well-meant effort was frustrated.

With any one less sweet-tempered, or less generally easy-going than David, a very few of such refusals would have effectually dried up the fountain of charity. But David never appeared to remember any of these little effusions. The day after such an outbreak he would come up to

the old man with a book in his hand, and say that he wanted a particular passage copied, and place half a crown in the book to show the place, and serenely depart, apparently unconscious of the scowls and muttered indignation of Mr. Thorold.

Sometimes the old man would do the work, sometimes would follow him and fling money and book down before him, and depart with a curse between his lips.

David was really getting quite thin with the anxiety he suffered on behalf of the attic lodgers.

Fiametta was very wretched, poor girl, thinking of the money she owed him, and she often alluded to it to him.

“But, my dear girl,” he remonstrated, “you know perfectly well that everybody has a right to live, and that it is a monstrous thing that some should possess millions while others have not even bread,” using her own words against her.

“So it is,” she replied, with a hot blush, for she felt his sarcasm; “but you have not millions.”

“I have a great deal more than many people have,” he answered. “You have so thoroughly converted me, Fiametta, that I feel it is positively wicked for me to have beefsteak-pie for dinner, while you have oatmeal. I wish you would consent to put your theories into practice. You are very inconsistent, and, to a truly Liberal mind, that is the worst sin you can commit.”

She only smiled sadly, and shook her head.

“It would be no use your doing it,” she said; “people would only say you were a fool. No; it must be done by the nation at large, not by one man. If you really cared about the movement, you would do your best to spread its teachings.”

“Read the correspondence in *Echo*, as

you do," answered David. "Well, I don't mind doing that, if Miss Hatchard will lend it to me when you and she have done with it. I believe it often contains some excellent jokes; but I should not like to be seen buying it at a bookstall, that would be too serious. Why, people would think I was a Liberal."

"Didn't you say I had converted you?"

"Oh, well, you are a Socialist, not an ordinary Liberal. You have been logical enough to go on to the end. I take it that even a steady Conservative like myself can have a pretty little excrescence of that sort growing out of him, like a mistletoe on an oak, that doesn't interfere with his real life and principles. Some Conservatives believe with Sir Charles Lyell about flint implements, and some believe otherwise, but it doesn't affect their political careers, or the morality of their lives. So with me. I believe in Socialism as you expound it to me, but

it doesn't affect me otherwise. I shall vote straight for all that."

"Vote against the liberty of the people, you mean."

"No, my dear; vote for yours and my liberty, and let the police look after the other people. I don't see why you and I should be hectorred and bothered and inspected because a few unprincipled scoundrels break the laws. I am for personal liberty. Liberty to take you out for a walk this evening, without being asked for my passport at the door. Come along."

"No," she said; "I am going to stay with Miss Hatchard."

But it ended in her going for the walk and meeting that worthy lady's reprimand, with the remark that this was a free land, and she was going to please herself; a statement that occasioned more uneasiness to the little artist than such an announcement should naturally have done.

In fact, Miss Hatchard was getting seriously alarmed about Fiametta. She had hoped that the portrait would have had a good effect upon her, for she took good care to impress upon her mind that David was evidently in love with this blue-eyed lady.

“I am glad to hear it,” said Fiametta, composedly. “Now you will not talk any more nonsense to me on the subject.”

But this had not satisfied Miss Hatchard at all. She watched the girl anxiously and nervously, and was far from being well pleased at her intimacy with David being renewed. She was a shrewd little woman, and knew more of David’s actions towards old Mr. Thorold than either of them had any idea of. She knew how valuable this help was, that in fact it kept them from starvation, for Fiametta’s work, being of course unskilful to begin with, could not possibly have supplied them with food and lodging ; so she had not the

heart to alienate Fiametta from him altogether. She also doubted her power of doing so, for though the story she proposed to tell her was sufficiently dreadful in her own eyes, it might make very little impression upon a girl of an obstinate nature like Fiametta's.

She fretted a good deal, for she believed that David meant ill towards the girl he seemed to help, and to Miss Hatchard's distorted vision this very help so insidiously given was but to prepare the way for the girl's ultimate ruin. That David would ever even contemplate marrying her, she did not believe. He had certainly shown no signs of ever wishing to do so, and there was every reason to believe that he was engaged to Fanny, except that he had not actually said so in so many words; but Miss Hatchard had put such adroit questions to him that she had, she considered, ample evidence that such an engagement existed.

David, as may easily be imagined, was not desirous of talking about Fanny, indeed, he avoided doing so in a way that was rather marked, and thus afforded additional suspicion to his busy little watcher.

He, of course, was perfectly unconscious of both her scrutiny and her suspicions, and was only pleased to have gained to a slight extent his old familiar footing with her. It was not in many women's natures, certainly not in Miss Hatchard's, to be able altogether to withstand the attractiveness of David's manner when he choose to put on his most winning ways. In spite of what she thought of him, and believed she had reason to fear of him, Miss Hatchard was obliged to admit him to a certain degree of intimacy, which the painting of the portrait considerably furthered.

David was very particular about this portrait, and though careful not to take

up too much of the artist's time, yet delayed matters a good deal by being very minute in his desires over the smallest details, so it took a good while to finish, though no undue amount of time was really occupied over the work.





CHAPTER VII.

MR. FOWLER'S marriage had taken place towards the end of July. Nellie and he had gone out early in the morning, and had been married in a gaunt and dismal church in Bloomsbury that was all pews and whitewash and memorial tablets—a place in which the vanity of all things seemed most awfully demonstrated, and that struck a chill into the tender soul of the poor little bride.

David was the only unofficial person present. He had escorted Mr. Fowler there, signed his name in the vestry, congratulated the bride, who was sadly in need of congratulations, poor little soul!

for she was thinking of the aunt who had been as a mother to her, and it was forlorn to be the only woman present at her wedding. David had been very gloomy until he saw her tears. In his present frame of mind there was something portentous and very awful in a marriage, and the idea that some day he might have to stand in his friend's position, with Fanny by his side, gave him an inexpressible sickening of the heart.

But the forlornness of Nellie's piteous little face touched him, and he laughed and joked in the vestry, regardless of the clergyman's solemn face, who had, perhaps, seen too many marriages to think lightly of any, and he ultimately succeeded in sending the child-bride away with her face dimpling with laughter, her handkerchief forgotten, and a light dancing in her eyes.

The Fowlers were not coming back

to Harcourt Street for a while. Mr. Fowler had had some unpleasant encounters with Mrs. Dodds, relative to his proposal to bring his young wife there, and his spirit being roused, he had given that worthy matron notice to quit, which was not at all what Mrs. Dodds wanted, for Harcourt Street was not a favourite residence of the lodger tribe. She tried to conciliate the little man, but he was firm in his decision, and took lodgings for his bride in Bayswater, as being a more cheerful neighbourhood for her to dwell in.

Their wedding trip was a very modest one. They spent the day at Hampton Court, wandering about the sweet old-fashioned gardens, and lunching under the trees in Bushy Park, and then, as the shades of evening drew on, they returned to town.

“I am afraid, darling,” said Mr. Fowler, as they stood in their little sitting-room

in Westbourne Park Terrace, "that you will find it very small and poor after your aunt's nice house."

"Oh, but I don't like big rooms!" cried the girl. She was in that rapturous state of mind in which a loving woman finds herself when she is called upon to make some sacrifice for the man she loves. "I like these nice little snug rooms. They do not feel so lonely."

"Y-you think you can be happy here, my love?"

"Oh yes, Frederick, quite, quite happy. I shall look after these dear little rooms for you, and keep them always nice and bright. Do you suppose the landlady will let me rub the furniture?"

"C-certainly, my love."

"And, oh, Frederick, do you think she will let me learn to cook?"

"I—I don't know, darling; but we would get a cooking stove if you would like to learn."

“ Oh, you are a darling! But what are these parcels on the table? ”

“ Dear me! ” said Mr. Fowler, peering at them. “ W-w-why, this is most extraordinary. I only left one here. It must be from David.”

“ Oh, how kind of him! And, oh! do you see, darling? It’s a sweet little kettle on a stand, with a spirit lamp underneath! How very thoughtful of him! Now I can make your breakfast and tea all by myself.”

“ Dear me, how v-v-very kind of him! I always told you, my love, that David was the kindest of men.”

“ So he is, I am sure. But what is this other parcel? ”

“ T-t-that,” stammered Mr. Fowler, bashfully, “ is a little p-p-p-present from me, darling. I—I—I don’t know what presents are usually made on these occasions; b-but I remembered what you had told me about your tastes the first day we ever

met. Y-y-you remember that delicious evening, don't you, darling ? So I thought I could not do better than get you a workbox. I should like it to have been of ivory, b-b-but it is only of wood."

"It's the dearest, loveliest, perfectest box I ever saw!" cried the bride, in raptures. "How kind of you to get it for me! Oh, a place for the buttons, and for the tapes! I never saw anything like it. And, oh! actually a thimble, and different sizes of cottons; and, I declare, a bodkin! Oh, you are a dear!"

"I told them to fit it up for a young lady who liked plain sewing," said Mr. Fowler, modestly. "And you really think you can be happy here?"

"I am delightfully happy," answered Nellie, putting her arm about her husband's neck and giving him a kiss. "I shall always be happy when with you." Mrs. Fowler suddenly stopped, looked round the room, and then cried, "But,

oh, Frederick darling, where are your slippers?"

"M-m-my slippers, love? I—I don't wear slippers."

"Oh, Frederick!" and a shade stole over Mrs. Fowler's pretty face; "oh, darling, wives *always* put their husband's slippers to warm before they come home. I know they do; at least, all nice wives in books do. Oh, Frederick, it won't seem like being married if I can't do that. Promise me, love, that you will get a pair of slippers."

"C-certainly, love; b-b-but won't it be rather warm now? It's such mild weather, you know, sweet."

But Mrs. Fowler only shook her pretty little head.

"Good wives always do it," she said; "and I am going to be a very good wife."

And so Mr. Fowler certainly thought she was. They lived in the little house in Bayswater in great contentment for

two months ; but Mr. Fowler, growing suspicious of a doctor's carriage that appeared outside the door twice a day regularly, and making inquiries, discovered that the upstairs lodger was ill with scarlet fever. In great terror for his young wife, Mr. Fowler rushed off to David, as his counsellor in all difficulties. David, knowing that Mrs. Dodds's ground floor was still vacant, advised him to return, and this was happily arranged to take place on the same day, so Mr. Fowler again became an inmate of No. 16, Harcourt Street, towards the beginning of October.

“ Mr. Heverest's compliments, and he 'ave 'ad a barskit from the country this morning, and would Mrs. Fowler please accept of these 'ere ? ” said Sarah Ann, the next day, as Mr. and Mrs. Fowler sat at breakfast, putting her head as far in at the door as she could, so as to get a good view of the bride.

“Oh, how kind!” cried Nellie, in delight; for “these ’ere” consisted of a bunch of autumn roses, in all their crimson and golden glory, and a basket of apples and pears.

“Dear me, how very kind of Everest!” said Mr. Fowler, highly gratified at this mark of attention to his wife. “R-r-really, my love, I think I ought to go up and thank him.”

“Yes, do, darling; and, oh, tell him how pleased I am! The roses, and the fruit, and everything, are they not delicious? Frederick, you must wear one in your coat.”

“R-r-really, my love, I n-n-n-never did such a thing in my life.”

“But you must now,” cried Mrs. Fowler, seizing him by the front of his coat. “Here is a lovely bud; stand still, Frederick, while I pin it in. Now you look so nice.”

“B-b-but, my love, I——”

“Oh, you must wear it, darling, to please me;” and Mr. Fowler went meekly on his way, feeling very uncomfortable in his floral decoration.

David was not in his room, but an empty hamper was, and Mr. Fowler, from the sound of voices that came from thence, rightly judged his friend to be upstairs.

“You must,” David was saying; “I shall have the most fearful and horrible indigestion if you won’t help me get through with these things. Mothers always stuff their sons when they are comforts to them, as I am. My mother’s opinion of my appetite is simply frightful. I have brought you the small fowls, I have really; and if you won’t have them, I will throw them out of window. I am not going to ruin my digestion by consuming half a dozen fowls. Miss Hatchard, make her listen to reason.”

“Well, Fiametta, as Mr. Everest have

offered the same to me, I think you may as well 'ave them. Fowls won't keep; and if, 'as he say, he have another pair downstairs——”

“An awfully big pair,” put in David.

“Well, then, I think you had better have them.”

“It's simple charity,” said David; “and as for the flowers, I hate a lot of mess about my rooms. I can't think what possessed my mother to put them in.”

“Perhaps the young lady did it—her!” said Miss Hatchard, pointing to the portrait.

David changed colour. Miss Hatchard saw it, and triumphed.

“Perhaps so,” he said carelessly; “but I hate cut flowers, so they can be swept up;” and he tossed them carelessly on to the floor.

“No; I will have them,” said Fiametta, suddenly; and she stooped and picked

them up. "They are very beautiful," she said; then selecting a particularly lovely one from the rest, she handed it to him and said, "You should keep this one in remembrance of the girl who sent them to you."

"I don't want any remembrance of her," replied David, and then stopped. "At least," he went on, "there is no occasion for any, and I don't like cut flowers."

There was rather an awkward pause. Miss Hatchard would not break it, but went on with her painting. Fiametta held the roses in her hand, and David stood looking at her.

"You ought to be painted with roses," he said at last, his thoughts having gone in quite a different direction from those of the two women, who were both thinking of Fanny; "they are your flowers."

"No," she said, throwing them down; "they are not mine. They are good

decorous garden flowers ; they would suit her"—pointing to the picture—"not me. Poppies are my flowers—flaming, passionate flowers, with a sleepy poison in their heart. They are harmless enough until they are crushed, then they poison those who put them to their lips."

She flashed upon him with a sudden anger in her great eyes, and left them both, treading on the fallen roses as she did so, and went away into her own room.

David and Miss Hatchard looked at each other.

"She is an odd girl—a very odd girl," said the woman, in a curious hard voice, "Got a touch of her father about her sometimes, don't ye think so?" And she peered at him with her small bright eyes.

"God forbid!" he said hastily, and walked away to the window.

"I have heard tell," continued Miss Hatchard, dabbing her brush against her

canvas, but looking keenly at her visitor the while, "as how there is somethin' queer about her family, and anybody kin see as how the old man is mad."

"The life they have led is enough to make them so," returned David, quickly; "it doesn't follow that there is insanity in the family. Is she often like this?" he asked.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Miss Hatchard, squeezing some blue paint out of a tube on to her palette; "'pears to me as she is a bit flighty sometimes."

"Miss Hatchard," said David, slowly turning and facing her, "you pretend to be her friend, and say this?"

"If it's true, it can be spoke, I s'pose."

"Not by those who call themselves her friends. Miss Hatchard, I did not think this of you."

There was so much grave reproof in David's tones that Miss Hatchard grew visibly uneasy.

“I shouldn’t say it to nobody but you,” she explained, unable to keep from justifying herself; “only to you.” Considering that she did not in the least believe what she was saying, this was undoubtedly true.

“You should never say it to anybody,” said David; “it is cruel to her father, and a libel upon her.”

“Well, I won’t,” said Miss Hatchard. “But you can’t deny yourself, Mr. Everest, as she is very queer.”

“So would you or I be if we had led her life,” retorted David, going towards the door. “You will see that she has the fowls cooked, won’t you?”

“Oh yes, I’ll see to that,” said the artist; “and thank you for the same.”

“Well, I dunno as I’ve done much good by that,” she thought, as David went down; “but p’raps the idea will fix itself in his mind after all; and it’s clear enough the old man is mad to my thinking, though not a mite nor morsel of it is

about her, poor dear. She is odd; but, Lor, anybody may be odd!"

David met Mr. Fowler on the first-floor landing.

"M-m-my dear Everest, how very kind of you! M-m-m-my w-w-wife," stammered Mr. Fowler, blushing furiously, "is delighted."

"All right; you will get used to it in time," said David. "You can come up here and practise during the daytime if you like."

"W-w-won't you come down and see her?" stammered Mr. Fowler.

"I can't stay now," said David, looking at his watch; "I'll come and call this evening."

And so he did, and Mrs. Fowler insisted upon making some tea for him with her own hands, out of the wonderful kettle. As an act of friendship it was very pleasing, as a cup of tea it was decidedly a failure, no one of the party being quite

clear as to when the water boiled, while Nellie anticipated that event by blowing out the spirit lamp as soon as the kettle began to hum gently.

But both David and Mr. Fowler declared it was the best tea they ever drank ; and Mr. Fowler honestly believed he was speaking the truth, and David would have told ten times the amount of untruth, had that been possible, to keep the tears out of the little bride's eyes when she saw the lukewarm, washy fluid that came out of the teapot, after an anxious ten minutes had been spent in watching it "draw." So they spent a very pleasant evening, and David enlisted Mrs. Fowler's sympathies to their fullest extent in behalf of Fiametta, which was his real object in spending the evening with them.

Mrs. Fowler professed herself ready to do anything and everything for the unfortunate girl, and felt most deliciously old and matronly at having her advice asked

and being made a party to certain little schemes for the girl's good.

"It will be a great thing for her," David said at parting, "to have you for her friend. Fancy, poor child, she has never even spoken to a lady. Miss Hatchard, the artist upstairs, is very kind, but she is not *quite* a lady. Still, she has been a good friend; but now that Miss Thorold is getting to be a woman, she naturally requires some other companionship. You will not mind her being a little vehement and odd sometimes?"

"Oh no, not a bit, poor thing! And oh, Frederick, you know how I used to complain because I had to go to lectures!" and Mrs. Fowler's gentle eyes filled with tears.

"She will be a great deal the better and happier for your friendship," said David, cheerily; and with a heart considerably lightened he went up to his own room.

“Fiametta,” said David to her the next day, as they took their accustomed short walk round the squares in the evening (she could not spare the time to go to the park now), “you know Mr. Fowler, who has come back to the ground floor? He has got married.”

“Indeed,” she answered, but gave no appearance of interest to the remark.

“Yes; and to such a pretty little wife. They ran away because her aunt wanted her to marry somebody else, so she is without friends, and is very lonely when her husband goes to his work. I wish you would go and see her.”

“Nobody comes to see me,” answered the girl, gloomily, “and I have no husband; why should I go and see her?”

“Because it will be kind of you to do so.”

“I hate what you call kindness. It is what has brought the world to this pass; for it makes those who can get it con-

tented, so they will not raise a finger for all those who have to live without it and suffer. I care too much for the unhappy ones to be 'kind' to those who are prosperous."

"But she is not prosperous. Her husband is poor, and she has alienated all her friends."

"She has her husband, and will be happy with him. She does not want me, nor I her."

"She would like to know you very much; she is interested in you."

"I am not an object of charity."

"You are at present, for I am exercising all my charity not to give you a good scolding for being so unkind to me. Why won't you do as I ask you?"

"Because there is no reason why I should do so. Mr. and Mrs. Fowler are not poor and in misery. You do not ask me to go into St. Giles, and New Compton Street, and see the people there, or worse

places than those where I have gone and talked with the people. Did you know that at one time I distributed papers in the public houses on Saturday nights in Newport market?"

"Good gracious! no, child. You horrify me. You in a public-house in Newport market!"

"Yes. I saw some pamphlets in a man's workshop. He was a cobbler, and lame, so he could not take them about, so I offered to do so. They were translations from Russian and French socialist papers, and they went straight to the point, I can assure you. The police got scent of it at last, and I had a hint to desist before I was caught. It would have been no use my being caught, and all the papers were gone, so I stayed away from there for a while. I have never been able to get any more since."

David walked by her side in silence for some time. He was really too much

surprised and shocked to say anything at first, and curiously enough it was not the papers he thought so much of as the fact that this young and beautiful girl had been in those loathsome dens, and had seen the sights and heard the language that must have gone on there. It gave him a deeper horror than anything he had ever felt.

“Fiametta, my poor child, I don’t know how to explain my horror!”

“The papers were right,” she replied, with a blaze of anger in her eyes, and turning sharply round upon him; “they were quite right. I glory in having put them into men’s hands. They told them to free themselves—the cowards not to have done it already! They told them of the tyranny of the rich, and the cursed pretended distinctions of classes; and they bid them strike for our common liberty and our common rights.”

“I am not thinking of the papers,” he

said, looking at her earnestly, “but of you—for *you* to go among such scenes, to be in such places !”

“They were not nice,” she replied, with a little shiver. “I saw some sights I do not like to think about. A woman choking a little child with gin, and then flinging it across the bar ; a man striking his poor pale, starved wife ; two little children drunk together. But I wish,” she added, raising her head and sweeping her hand towards the houses in Russell Square—“I wish I could drag the people that live here, and there, and there, all these solid, respectable, decent ladies and gentlemen, into those places—ay, and keep them there for a bit. They might think differently of their dainty selves when they saw their brothers and sisters.”

“Don’t talk of it,” said David ; “I can’t bear to think of it.”

“No ; you are dainty, too,” she said, flashing her dark eyes upon him in her

disdain. "You have not the soul of a spider, or you would never rest while all that sin and misery goes on about you."

"But what did you do? You only taught them to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. What have these people here done to bring about that state of things? Why should they be punished?"

"They are keeping it up," she persisted, "pretending that they have superior rights to the poor. They seem to forget that even your Christ was poor."

"You needn't give me a monopoly of Christianity," said David. "Besides," he added, in rather a more solemn tone than was usual to him, "you seem to forget that he is *your* Christ as well as mine. However, keeping theology out of it, who is pretending anything about superior rights? No one claims any more than the right to enjoy and hold possession of that which their own labours or that

of their fathers created, and their own self-denial or self-restraint, or that of their fathers, has preserved to them."

"Their own labour, indeed!" replied Fiametta, contemptuously. "Is it their own labour that makes their houses increase in value year after year while they sit with folded hands?"

"The people in Russell Square, to whom you seem to refer," said David, "mostly rent their houses of the Duke of Bedford. But that is a mere detail."

"Well, the Duke of Bedford, then."

"She has been running her pretty head up against our old friend the unearned increment, and after that it's all hopeless! When lovely woman stoops to political economy, and finds too late that there is such a thing as an unearned increment, why then—— I don't know what then. Generally it is the State, or the poor, or somebody who hasn't got it, that is to step in and collar this unearned

increment. Very well, will the State, or the poor, or somebody who hasn't got it, pay up the unearned *decrement* when it comes, as it precious soon will under that form of government. Which, however, is not an original idea of mine."

"You are scoffing at me," cried the girl. "You are as cruel as any of them. You know very well that *all* property is theft."

"I don't know anything of the sort."

"But it is Proudhon who says so, '*La propriété c'est le vol*.'"

"I don't know Mr. Proudhon," said David, "but if he is a real Frenchman he probably said '*le vol*'; but that again is a mere detail. Meanwhile, who is he that should bring us a new revelation of this sort? Moses—you may have heard of him, my dear; he wrote part of an apparently obsolete work called the Bible—discountenanced stealing quite as much as Mr. Proudhon, and yet his elaborate

rules with respect to inheritance show that he acknowledged the possession and descent of property as a rightful thing. I think I agree with Moses, if I may presume to say so."

"Of course you do. You belong to your State-paid Church that grinds down the poor."

"The Church of England, to which I have the honour to belong, is not State-paid, though many people erroneously call it so. But if it were, it would be none the worse a Church. I am a State-paid man, though shamefully underpaid considering the work I—leave undone; but I am none the worse a man for that. You show too great a disregard for details, Miss Thorold; and, moreover, you are getting excited. Let me give you one little bit of advice. Don't think so much of humanity at large, but more of individuals in particular—in fact, of details. Try and make somebody happy."

“No,” she said sorrowfully as she shook her head, and a melancholy, tender light stole over her dark eyes—“no; it is the happiness of the few that keeps so many wretched. Every grain of happiness added to the fortunate holds them back from rescuing the miserable. Those who are happy do not care to hear of misery. If the fortunate few could be made miserable, they would try and help their wretched sisters and brothers, not ignore them.”

“Where do you get such fancies from, child?”

“Fancies!” she cried, flashing her dark wild eyes upon him. “Yes, to you they are fancies, perhaps. See the sights that I have seen! No; you are too dainty for that. You will go and see Mrs. Fowler instead; she is pleasanter company than my sisters, who work seventeen hours a day to give their children dry bread.”

“Won’t you go and see Mrs. Fowler too?”

“No, I will not. I should be wronging my wretched sisters by doing so.”

“Very well, my dear. Here we are at home. Will it make you miserable by giving me a kiss? If so, indulge your eccentricity.”

Her only answer was an angry glitter in her eyes, and a hasty withdrawal of her hand from his grasp, and she went rapidly up the stairs to her own room.

David paused for a moment and looked after her. He felt a little uncomfortable.

“I wonder if she is angry?” he said. “Really she is very interesting. I wonder if all girls are equally so when one gets to know them.”





CHAPTER VIII.

THE garrets were both dark when Fiametta reached them. No gleam from the street gas-lamps reached their windowless height. The dirty skylight was but a pale patch in the roof, but no light came through it into the rooms below. She struck a match and lit their little lamp, and looked about for her father. He was generally at home long before this, for the days of electric light at the British Museum were then in the misty future. He was not in, and had evidently not been in at all, for his papers had not been touched since the morning. Her own flower-making materials lay beside them just as she had left them.

There had been no fire in the grate all day, though the weather had been chill and cold. It seemed scarcely worth while to light one now, as her father had not come in, and it was getting late; so she cut herself a slice of bread and butter, and drank some cold tea that had been left from the morning for her evening meal, and then took up her work.

Perhaps her fingers were cold, or her brain too busy with thoughts away from her work, for she did not succeed very well, spoilt one or two flowers, and then in a fit of despair pushed the things from her, and, leaning her elbows on the table, rested her forehead upon her hands in her favourite childish attitude for thinking.

Her thoughts were not pleasant. Poor Fiametta's rarely were. For a girl of her eager passionate spirit, with a strong disposition to turn over in her mind and brood upon matters beyond her reach, her solitary pinched life had been

the very worst possible training. Her only companion had been the grim monomaniac, her father—the worst companion under the circumstances she could have had, for it intensified in a markedly morbid manner her natural tendency to secret and hopeless brooding.

Think of her life—a girl with the traditions and feelings of an artistic, beauty-loving race within her, a heart capable of great and passionate attachment, a spirit brave enough to face an empire, a courage well-nigh dauntless, an intellect above the average of women's, and, to crown all, promise of beauty such as is rarely seen among the daughters of men. She had lived in a bare, rotten old garret in a filthy, noisy street, with not even a glimpse of pure sky visible to her, with no friends, no pursuits, no books, save some French and Italian dictionaries and grammars, by the help of which, and with some instruction from her father, she had

attained a moderate acquaintance with the two languages. Of other education she had none, absolutely none, save what she had gathered for herself in her wanderings in the streets, and in the reading of cheap newspapers, and, most unfortunately for herself, a few socialist works that had been given her by a former lodger in the house.

These books were ordinary works enough in one sense, but in them was all the romance and enthusiasm that ever came across the girl's life. She knew what the poverty and the misery of the poor actually was; she saw and felt it—felt it like a grinding pain about her life; until she read these books she had never dreamt of any release from it. They were the one thing needful to bring into full tide that great torrent of enthusiasm that was part of her nature. She had precisely the natural qualifications for a social revolu-

tionist—an absolute disregard of herself, her own life, and happiness; a hearty contempt for cowardice or fear of any sort. She could have met death itself quite calmly. She had no ties of affection or kindred that pressed heavily upon her. Her father had never sought or desired her love or confidence, and she knew no one else. She had that quality, so curious and rare in a woman—the capability for great devotion to a cause without any personal feeling of any sort coming into it. She did not seem to feel the need of any love in her life; she was young still, it is true, but girls before they are eighteen have confidential and wonderfully attached female friends, if they are not actually in love. It is a rare thing to meet with a girl who has no bosom friend, never had, and never wished to have one. Fiametta had been alone all her life until—and this sort of until, it is generally believed,

comes to every woman at some time—until she met David.

But even with him she had to be drawn on by very slow degrees, and with a very slack cord, and it was David who was desirous of the friendship all along, not Fiametta. There was not the least deception in her telling him she did not want him. She was perfectly sincere, and really felt no need for his care or affection. Her heart seemed to have gone out of her, or to have been all absorbed in the enthusiasm of her spirit.

David had, after the manner of men, conceived an idea of the girl and stuck to it. He believed her socialism and enthusiasm to be a mere half-caught fancy, and treated it accordingly, never seeing the importance it was to her; that it, in fact, held all that she had ever known of beauty, poetry, love, happiness—all that a girl holds dear. He never dreamt how his jokes and

jeers lived in the girl's mind, and were brooded over by her in her long lonely hours. In all his life he had never been so cruel to any one as he was to poor Fiametta, and in all his life he had never so exerted himself to be kind to any one as to her.

He had become a great deal to her, of course; his words would not have had so much effect upon her otherwise. The sudden introduction of a handsome young man into a lonely girl's life is naturally accompanied by some mental disturbance, especially if that young man appears to make it the object of his life to be agreeable to the aforesaid girl. David was constantly testifying by his acts that he thought often of her. Nobody had ever thought about her before. He was always trying to brighten her life for her, and paying her sundry little attentions which not even the most untamed savage female mind could quite resist: and

Fiametta was not a savage; only passionate and untaught, and grievously led astray by the false preaching of what is perhaps not, after all, a very remarkably true doctrine.

She had thought far more about him than he ever supposed she did, but she also cared less. She was not a bit in love with him. Not that David for an instant imagined she was; he only believed her to have the same friendly feelings towards himself that he had for her. In point of fact, she had less, for it was not in her to give a quiet cold friendship. She would plunge headlong into passionate love, or she would be indifferent; and so far she had had no indication of love at all, and was sceptical as to its very existence.

Poor child! poor girl! Every healthy impulse in her stifled and ground down by the force of her misguided, blinded will; every natural affection not only

without bud or flower, but apparently with its very roots pulled up and flung away. No joys, no pleasures, no beauty, no prospect of anything but a starved and miserable existence, and a hopeless death.

She had never been taught any Christianity. Her mother had belonged to the Italian party of freedom, and was therefore above such small considerations as belief in any future, except the future of a popeless Italy and an Italian king. Her husband had been of the same faith, or no faith, for of late years he had never even thought of Italy, except to curse the folly that had led to the melting of his wife's coins into the money-pot of the adventurers of "united Italy." His wife's father and brother had perished in the wars; there were no nearer relations than some distant cousins, and by this time he had forgotten even their names, for all his thoughts were absorbed in his own family pedigree. Fiametta

knew little of her mother's family, except that they had mostly perished in the early part of the struggle for "freedom," that long-suffering and much-abused word. What that particular freedom was for which they suffered, or whether it did any good to anybody, she did not know, but she was proud of it, and brooded over it, and fed her mind upon it, to her own great hurt, for it stimulated her to follow in their steps. This might, of course, have been very well if she had known what those steps were, or whither hers were likely to take her. With that disregard of details for which David rebuked her, she plunged headlong into grand feelings and lofty desires and glorious sentiments, and never for a moment questioned their perfect utility.

Fortunately for her—unfortunately, she thought—she knew no one who could help her to put any of her sentiments into practice, supposing they could work

in such harness. The seditious cobbler had disappeared. The tracts had apparently brought forth no fruit, or, if they had, those concerned in the movement did not invite the co-operation of a friendless, unknown girl, as poor or poorer than themselves. Fiametta could do nothing but preach her ideas, and—fatal objection to that—she had no audience. She could not stop and address people in the street; she knew no one personally out of the lodging-house. The public-house bar, which is about the only place where an audience of working men can be assured at all times, was closed to her by the “mean and grasping spirit” of the publicans, who did not find that she consumed gin herself or led to its consumption by others. So Fiametta’s declamation at the bar was effectually stopped, and she held thereafter strong opinions on the demoralizing effect of the drink traffic.

It is but fair both to her and the publicans to say she made but a very short struggle for this effort of hers to bear fruit. It was just after the distribution of the tracts that she tried going to one or two public-houses without the papers, and only her own voice to instruct. She had been stopped at the very beginning, most mercifully, by the proprietors, and had never tried it again. One can hardly think of a girl's doing such a thing without a shudder.

Fiametta had not shuddered; she had been angry, very angry, but she was not shocked. Evil things had been said around her and to her, but they had passed over her without harm. While the fire of her enthusiasm was on her, her girlhood, her very womanhood seemed to leave her: she might have been fashioned in ice for all the bodily presence she felt. She was so completely carried out of herself by the force of her

imagination and excitement, that she had no consciousness of the coarseness and insult that surrounded her; she was filled to overflowing with the message of happiness she had to deliver.

She would have made a very good saint had she been born in early days—would have vied with Saint Theresa in her visions, or Saint Rose of Lima in her austerities. Also, had she had another home, and another training, she might have made an equally good sinner. She had grand capabilities for both. No member of the *demi-monde* could have been more reckless than she could be; no great lady of the old torturing, Inquisition times more cruel than she could have been. Perhaps, after all, it was a merciful dispensation of Providence that made her a half-starved, impotent socialist in a garret.

Is there any story, even in that collection of the best stories in the world,

the Bible, that tells a tale of such long unnoticed suffering as that of the impotent man by the pool of Bethesda. Eight and thirty years of pain, eight and thirty disappointments. There was not even hope left to the man, nothing but patient resignation. But this was after eight and thirty years. Think of the sickening torture of the first few years, the wild despair, the misery that had been gone through before the uncomplaining patience of the answer, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool; but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." Think of the suffering and despair that wrought such calmness after eight and thirty disappointments.

Fiametta had not lived yet to even one half of those disappointments, without counting the man's actual life, and she was by no means patient under her impotence. Perhaps he was not so at first.

And our heroine—she is our heroine, for there is no woman with half her real worth within these pages—was the very reverse of patient or contented. The very force of her misspent energy was enough to keep her wild as a caged tiger. She had all the qualifications for a leader or a martyr, and even the martyrdom was denied her. It must be uncomfortable to be created for a martyr, and to find no opportunity of exercising one's profession.

Perhaps this chapter ought to have come some way before in this book. It is a digression just now, for Fiametta has been left all this time brooding with her head upon her hands in her solitary garret. But it has been purposely delayed, that the girl, whose strange vivid character was as a match to the finely spun, limp tow of David's nature, should, little by little and by degrees, show herself and her influence upon the easy-

going, sweet-tempered nature of our hero. Gradually she had aroused in him that one quality the absence of which his mother deplored so often — ambition, interest, activity, call it what you will. He had no conception of it, of course ; quite insensibly she had led him on in entire ignorance herself of the proceeding ; but from being a lazy, happy-go-lucky youth, with no particular earnestness, and no particular seriousness, he was rapidly developing into a thoughtful and earnest man, and the end and beginning and middle of it all was Fiametta.





CHAPTER IX.

WE left Fiametta sitting in the attic, waiting for her father. He did not come in until very late. He had evidently been wandering about the streets for some time, for he was footsore and muddy. He sank into a chair, and seemed unable even to taste the food his daughter placed before him. She gave him a little cold tea, the strongest beverage they had, and that revived him after a while; but he could not eat, though he had not tasted food for some time.

“I have been insulted to-day,” he said hoarsely, as he pushed the plate away from him; “insulted, and that by some

low bookworm of a fellow whose father was a jailor, and his mother a thief."

"Whom do you know with such a remarkable pedigree?" asked his daughter, coldly.

"Whom do I know? I tell you I know none of them, they are not fit for a gentleman to associate with. A pack of bookmaking scoundrels! And they take upon themselves to dictate to me—to *me*, who have the blood of heroes in my veins; whose ancestors were great men when theirs were at the plough-tail, if they ever had any, that is."

"And a fine thing our ancestors have done for us," she answered. "Theirs, at any rate, have taught them to earn their own living decently."

"I tell you they are insolent jack-in-offices, who have crept into government places by their servile crawling that no gentleman could stoop to. Ah, that is it; no gentleman can compete with such

fellows. In these days any low-born fellow has a gentleman at a disadvantage."

He stopped, and muttered to himself under his breath, and kept pushing and pulling about his papers in his old aimless manner, arranging only to disarrange, and taking up a paper to read only to put it away unread. Meanwhile, his daughter had begun her work again, and was going on steadily with it.

"It is a trick, a conspiracy!" he began again. "They know now that I am on the right track. It was impossible but that I should find it, after all these years. *They* knew all along, but they would not help a gentleman. They knew where those old leases lay, of course they did; they knew they would help me—they kept them back on purpose. On the right track at last, though. Child, did I tell you I have at last come upon the trace of old Sir Harold Thorold's eldest son John, who

has been declared by my rascally cousin to have died without an heir? I shall prove it now, prove it all beyond a doubt."

"Is that what you are so angry about?"

"Angry about? Angry to find the proof I have looked for so long? Fiametta, you must be mad! I think you are sometimes," he went on, looking at her fixedly. "Mad, you must be mad, to take no interest in all my researches. Like a girl, you care only for the present, and your finery."—It was a fiction of his that she made the flowers for her own adornment; it had been found the only means to prevent his destroying them, and Miss Hatchard had fostered the idea.—"But you will care when I get it all. Ha, ha! Yes, women like to get all the fruits, and share none of the toil of producing."

He was silent again for awhile; then he burst out—

“But, by God! I will not bear it; it is too foul an insult! Child, do you believe that a man is any more or less of a gentleman because of his clothes?”

“No,” she said.

“Ah, I knew you would be right. You are a lady; you know what is true in such matters. These are only low, ignorant fellows, what should they know about gentlemen?”

“What about your clothes?” she asked.

He sprang upon his feet in the energy of his rage, and shook his tattered garments before her face.

“This, and this, and this!” he cried, clutching at his threadbare coat, the sleeves of which hung like fringes over his fingers, and showing his worn and frayed trousers, and his patched and broken boots, of which the upper leather scarcely clung to the soles. “These are what they complain of. Did clothes ever make

a gentleman ! These cads, these cheats, these thieves, they complain of my dress ! These upstarts, these beggars, these scoundrels, presume to tell me that I am not fit to sit in the same room as a beggarly clerk, or a miserable pedagogue, or some fantastical old women ! These—these are the people who complain to the officials that I, the heir to one of the oldest properties in Kent, am not fit to sit in the same room with them. The grovelling, gutter-bred, low-born, plebeian tradesmen ! ”

“ What does it matter what they say ? ” she asked, as he paused in the torrent of his rage to take breath.

“ I tell you they insult me ; they complain of me as a nuisance ; they have spoken of me to the officials, and they tell me that if I do not dress better I must stay away from the reading-room. It is a conspiracy ; my cousin is at the bottom of it. They have been bribed to get me

away, because they know that at last I have the proofs in my hands. Child"—and he drew nearer and put his mouth to her ear—"child, I have found a lease granted by one Harvey Thorold, son of John Thorold—John Thorold that James declares to have died without issue. I know better; I always have known better, and now here—here is the proof. Ha, ha! And they think to keep me away because of my clothes. They shall not find Stephen Thorold so easily disposed of; no, indeed!" And the old man hugged himself in the ecstasy of his joy.

"But this lease?" asked his daughter. "Have you any proof that it is granted by the same man? There might have been two John Thorolds. It is not a very uncommon name."

He shook his clenched fist before her eyes.

"How dare you say such a thing to me?" he shouted. "How dare you

question me ? You are a girl, an idiot ; you do not understand such things. Go to your bed. Go away from my sight ! ”

“ It is time for you to go to bed, too,” she answered quietly.

Her cold, even tones seemed to calm him. He paused in his excited walk to and fro, and, passing his thin hand over his haggard chin, looked vacantly at her.

“ It is all for her sake,” he said at last, in a shrill whisper ; “ all for her. Why should I strive for riches, but for her ? Fiametta, wealth and prosperity are before you ! ”

“ Go to sleep now,” she said gently, while her dark eyes rested compassionately upon him. It was not his poverty or his disappointment that she pitied, but a sudden tenderness for his wandering intellect and his wavering understanding swept over her. She had never pitied him before. It had never occurred to her to do so any more than to pity herself.

All her native tenderness of nature had been turned back and distorted by the one great passion of her life. Now, for the first time, she suffered some touch of natural feeling to overcome her. "Good night, dear," she said; and she laid her hand on the old man's shoulder and kissed him.

"Good night," he answered vacantly. "It's all for her, for my beautiful golden-haired Fiametta;" and he looked helplessly at her. It was of his wife he was thinking.

His daughter went into her little room; but she did not go to bed until she knew that he was safe in bed, and his candle out, and then she slowly undressed herself, and lay down, but no sleep came to her eyes for many hours. When sleep did come, it came heavily to her, and she slept on long after her usual hour.

Daylight does not come very early to Londoners in the beginning of October, but it was well after daylight when Fia-

metta awoke. Having dressed herself hastily, she went into the next room, surprised to receive no answer from her father to her inquiries if he was dressed. The room was empty, he had evidently gone out, and without tasting a morsel of breakfast, for the food was in the cupboard precisely as she had placed it last night.

It was not his custom to go out before the hour at which the reading-room opened, and she wondered at his absence, but busied herself in preparing breakfast, and in lighting the fire against his return.

It was a bitterly cold morning, raw and damp and chilly, with a keen wind blowing which came through the chinks in the crazy roof and the badly fitting skylight. She waited some time for him, until nearly ten, and then she ate her breakfast by herself, and went on with her flower-making.

All the morning she worked, and there was still no sign of him. She ate her

lunch of bread and butter, and hung one of the fowls that David had given her by a string in front of the fire to cook against her father's return from the Museum at five o'clock, for the landlady did not undertake to do any cooking for them. Once or twice she thought of going there to look for him, but she could ill spare the daylight from her work, for she was already behind with the quantity she had to take back that night. So she worked on all day, and trusted to his coming in as usual, when with other waifs and strays he was turned out of the reading-room.

To her surprise she received a visitor in the afternoon ; not Miss Hatchard, who was the only person who had ever been to see her before, but a young and pretty lady, who knocked timidly at the door.

"Come in," said Fiametta, raising her head from her work in surprise.

"Oh, thank you," said a sweet childish

voice. "May I really come in? You are Miss Thorold, are you not?"

"I am Fiametta Thorold."

"Yes, quite so. I am"—and here the visitor blushed—"I am Mrs. Fowler, Mrs. Frederick Fowler. My husband has lived downstairs for a long time."

"I have not the pleasure of his acquaintance," said Fiametta, coldly.

"Oh, but I am sure you will like him; and he so much wants to know you. Mr. Everest has told us so much about you, and you can't think how interested we are, and in the same house, too!"

"The ground floor," said Fiametta, "is a long way from the attics. The inhabitants of the rooms are, if anything, farther apart."

"Oh no, don't say so," cried pretty little Mrs. Fowler, rather embarrassed to find her efforts at friendship taken so coldly. "I am sure you won't think so when you know us."

“*I* do not think so now,” she answered. “I believe all men are equal, but you do not think so.”

“Oh, I don’t know anything about it,” said Nellie, shaking her head. “It sounds awfully like political economy, or some of those *dreadful* things, and Frederick has promised me I shall never be bothered with them any more. You are not—oh dear, you are not learned, are you?”

“No.”

“I am glad of that,” said Nellie, with a sigh of relief. “And what pretty things you can make! and oh, you can cook too! Tell me, why do you keep the fowl turning round on a string? Why not let it stand still and do one side first, and then the other?”

“Because it would get burnt.”

“Dear me, would it really? Now, I should never have thought of that, and I do so want to learn to cook. And

was it not kind of Mr. Everest? He actually gave me the loveliest little kettle you ever saw, with a spirit lamp, and an extinguisher, and everything complete. I wish you would come down and see it."

"I cannot leave my work," said Fiametta, more graciously than before. She was amused, this solemn, dark-eyed girl, with the soft, kitten-like ways of the new bride. She was something so bright and fresh and babyish. Fiametta could never remember feeling so young as this little wife.

"Then you must come when you have finished," said Nellie, with her little authoritative way, "and have some tea with me out of it. It's the dearest little kettle; and wasn't it kind of Mr. Everest to think of it?"

"Mr. Everest has a strong belief in kindness," said Fiametta, in rather an angry voice. Somehow it jarred upon

her that David had been attentive to this little chattering creature.

“Oh yes,” echoed the bride, enthusiastically, clasping her hands. “And do you know, he actually sent me yesterday some roses, *such* lovely ones, and a basket of fruit. I think he is just delightful, don’t you?”

“No,” said Fiametta, so suddenly and fiercely that Nellie started with alarm. “I think he is lazy, shuffling, and scoffing. He has all the qualities of a gentleman!” she said, with a bitter emphasis.

“Good gracious!” said Nellie, considerably puzzled by the words and the tone. “Of course, that is what makes him so nice; he is a gentleman. Don’t you like gentlemen?”

“No. I would sweep every gentleman off the face of the earth.”

“Then I think you are very unkind,” said Nellie, drawing her little figure up. “Sweep my Frederick off, indeed! I

don't know how you can say such wicked, cruel things ;” and Nellie began to cry.

Fiametta looked at her in some amazement.

“ Don't cry,” she said at length softly, and there was something very irresistible in her low tones ; “ don't cry.”

“ You didn't mean it, did you ? ” asked Nellie, looking out from her handkerchief.

“ Yes, I did mean it,” said the other sadly ; and then there was a pause. “ I am a Socialist,” she said at length, in explanation.

“ Oh, if that's the case,” said Nellie, briskly putting away her handkerchief, “ I don't mind a bit. I don't know what a Socialist is, but I suppose it's something with ‘ views.’ Aunt and her friends had all sorts of ‘ views.’ I think they are tiresome, but they don't mean anything. Please don't tell me what your views are, for I would rather not know. I am very stupid about all those things. Let us

talk about something else instead. Do you live here all alone ? ”

“ No ; my father lives here too.”

“ How nice ! ” said Nellie, reflectively. “ I never had a father—at least, I never knew him, you know. Don’t you find it very lonely when he is out ? ”

“ No.”

“ Ah, I see ; you think. I suppose ‘ views ’ are useful if you like thinking about them. I am dreadfully lonely when Frederick goes away to his work. You will come and see me then, won’t you ? ”

“ I have my work to do.”

“ Oh, of course ; I forgot. Well, you will let me come and see you, won’t you ? I mean that in two ways, to talk to you and look at you, for I think you are lovely. And,” she added sagely, putting her head on one side and pursing up her lips, as if she was wonderfully sagacious in having found it out, “ I believe Mr. Everest thinks so too.”

One of Fiametta's sudden hot blushes rose over her neck and face. Nellie saw it, of course, and laughed in her pretty baby fashion, and putting her arms about her new friend's neck as she sat busy at her work, printed a soft little kiss upon her brow, and departed, saying—

“I shall come again soon, but Frederick is waiting for me now. Good-bye.”





CHAPTER X.

FIAMETTA did not respond either to Nellie's embrace or kiss; and perhaps it was as well that that little person did not look back on her way to the door, for she would have been considerably astonished to see the darkening scowl on her new friend's face that followed her. As soon as she was gone, Fiametta rose from her seat and firmly bolted and locked the door upon her visitor; then, standing in the middle of the room with clenched hands and set teeth, seemed to be lost in thought. That it was slightly bewildered thought was testified by the vacant air with which she gazed round the room at

its conclusion, and then, seeming to recollect herself, went into her own little room, and kneeling down before a box there, began to toss its contents on to the floor in a rapid and eager manner.

They were chiefly odds and ends of old clothes that she had grown out of, and some newspapers and pamphlets. But at last, in the bottom of the box, she came upon the object of her search. It was a tiny dagger, almost a toy, with a jewelled hilt, and a sharp glittering blade that was sheathed in a red velvet scabbard.

She drew it out and looked at it, examined the edge, but never once touched its sharp sides. There was a stain upon the point of it, a dull yellowish mark, but she did not try to rub it off, only gazed eagerly at it, holding it in her hand for several minutes as if it contained a horrid fascination for her. A gleam of sunshine, a feeble wandering ray, fell upon the skylight at

this moment, and its intercepted light fell full upon the kneeling girl. She still wore her often-washed old lilac cotton gown, possibly the least romantic gown that a girl can wear; it is too clearly connected with a maid-of-all-work to allow of much poetry being thrown over it. Fiametta's was tight and faded and limp, but as her glorious hair came falling down about her shoulders, from the energetic movement of her head as she threw it back to catch the sunlight on the blade, its washed colour made a delicate lilac ground for the crisp burnt gold of her hair to rest on. Her eyes blazed and shone with their fiery wild light; her lips parted in the energy of her thoughts; the creamy hue of her skin seemed almost to glisten with the force of her emotion, as the white ground of a panther's shines with the quiverings of the animal's body. Like some beautiful wild animal she knelt there, holding the

dagger poised in her hand as if for a deadly blow. She would have made a fitting study for an artist illustrating some old Italian story of revenge.

There came a knock at the outer door. The girl started, and slid the bright blade into its velvet sheath, and thrust both hastily in her bosom. No one, not even her father, knew of this relic of her mother's family that she had. She paused a moment on her knees, waiting for the knock to be repeated.

"Are you in, Fiametta?" asked David's voice.

She pressed the dagger upon her breast with her hand.

"Yes," she said, rising and going to the door and flinging it open. "What do you want?"

"I want you to come down," he said; and his face was very pale, and his voice much agitated. "Will you come into Miss Hatchard's room—she is out, but

I expect she will be in presently—or will you come down into the Fowlers' room?"

"I will stay here," she replied. "What have you to say to me?"

"I hardly know how to tell you," he said, taking her hand in his; but she drew it away again. "My poor child, come down to Mrs. Fowler's."

"No; she has been here. I do not like her. What have you to tell me?"

"My dear, it is about your father. He is well; do not fear for his health."

"I fear nothing," she said, as he paused, not knowing how to best break the news to her. "Go on."

"My dear, a misfortune has come to him. Did he tell you about a lease that he had found?"

"Yes."

"You know how anxious he has always been about this question of his pedigree—how he has thought about it, and worked

about it, until perhaps it has affected his mind a little? Do you not think that is possible, dear?"

She shook her head, but did not speak.

"Dear, you must be prepared for very bad news. It seems that yesterday he had a hint from the authorities of the British Museum that—— Perhaps he told you?"

"Yes; that his clothes were not decent enough to go there. Go on."

"Well, to-day they told him of it again, and said he must come there no more. I suppose, dear, that that may have upset him, and he was not quite clear as to what he was doing; but it appears that one of the assistants saw him cut the lease that he had found out of a book in which it was bound up with several others, and put it in his pocket. At the door he was arrested, and taken before a magistrate. My poor dear, he

did not know what he was doing, I am sure of that."

"No," she said; "he knew. We have none of us ever been mad. He knew quite well. Tell me the rest."

"Fortunately, he sent for me," continued David, "for I was able to say something for him, about his life and studious habits, and—and so on. But I could not get him off, my dear. It appears there have been several cases of the sort lately, and the magistrate was, unfortunately, determined to make an example. Oh, my poor dear, he is committed for trial."

She looked up at him, quite white and staring. He put his arm about her, but she put it away again.

"He will be in prison for theft," she repeated slowly; "that is a disgrace."

"If he had known what he was about, it might be," said David, gently; "but, dear, I am sure he did not."

“Yes, he did,” she said wearily. “He told me last night that they should not baulk him of his treasure.”

It was useless to argue with her. Her very suspicion of last night only tended to make her cling the firmer to her father’s sanity. Perhaps the knowledge of her own untrained mind taught her how to distinguish between the enthusiasm of an intense desire and absolute insanity. She was right, too ; her father was not insane, only all his life was wrapped around the fulfilment of his dreams.

“I will try and get leave for you to go and see him,” said David. “In the mean time, we must make some arrangement for you. You cannot live here all alone. I must speak to Miss Hatchard about it.”

“No ; I must stay here. I will not go away.”

“Come down now, and go for a little

walk with me. Oh, my poor child ! you must not stay here all the evening by yourself."

"Yes, I wish to. Please, go away now."

"Promise me to eat your dinner."

She shook her head.

"I have no appetite ; it would choke me."

"My dear, I will not leave you like this. Oh, here is Miss Hatchard ! Miss Hatchard, come up here, please."

"Well, I never !" ejaculated that lady, as she came to the top of the garret stairs, and saw David and Fiametta there alone ; "well, I never ! And what do *you* do 'ere, may I ask ?"

"Mr. Thorold has met with a great misfortune," he whispered to her, as Fiametta turned away and went into her own little room. "He is committed for trial for taking a lease from the Museum. Of course he did not know

what he was about, but she won't believe that. Will you stay with her, and try and get her to eat something, and——”

“Oh yes, Mr. Everest; I can stay with her, and look after her. You needn't tell me; and if you'll take my advice, you will take yourself off. This ain't the place for a young man like you to be in.”

“You will let me know how she is to-night?” he asked, in so sorrowful and earnest a tone that the little artist's heart was melted for the moment.

“Oh yes; I'll let you know,” she said. “Poor dear! she will be safe with me.”

“Thank you; I know she will. Good-bye,” said David, gratefully; then, turning back, he added, “I am going to try and get permission for her to see him. You will be very careful with her, poor thing?”

“Oh yes. Get along, do!” snapped Miss Hatchard, her momentary kindness vanishing at what she considered David's

assumption of proprietorship in Fiametta. "Lor, anybody would think he was her husband, or brother, or uncle, to hear the way he go on," she added to herself. "And what business 'as 'e to come up 'ere at all? Bad news could keep, I should think."

She found Fiametta standing in her room. She had not fallen upon the bed, or given way to weeping, or abandoned herself to any external signs of grief; she was only standing with her hands clasped before her, and her eyes cast down, apparently very deep in thought. She did not start when Miss Hatchard touched her shoulder, but only looked at her in a dazed, dull way.

"Lor! don't take it so to heart, my dear," ejaculated that worthy woman. "It ain't nothin', and it 'ull do him a sight of good to be kept away from his books. Bless yer, my dear, he 'll come out all the better for it."

“We are disgraced,” said the girl, slowly.

“Lor, now, my dear, don’t take it that way. Why, there’s plenty of gentlemen been in prison before now. Look at all your ma’s family, as you’ve told me on; they were in prison often enough.”

“Yes, for their country’s sake, not as common felons for stealing. Going to prison for trying to free one’s country is the next most glorious thing to freeing it.”

“Lor!” said Miss Hatchard, as the girl clasped her hands and looked wildly about her; “now, don’t take on so. Come down and have a cup of tea; it ’ull do you good.”

“No. Oh, Miss Hatchard, to be in prison for stealing! He will never be able to live through it.”

“Oh no; it ain’t so bad as all that, my dear. Moreover,” and Miss Hatchard paused and looked dubiously at her friend, as if not quite certain how her words

would be taken, "perhaps your pa has got the same notions about property as you have. 'All property is theft,' ain't I heard you say that afore now? Lor!" as Fiametta faced round upon her with clenched hands and glistening teeth, "I didn't mean nothin', my dear!"

"You mean to say that I would steal? that I am a thief? that I would take some paltry property from some other person?"

"Well, my dear, how could I tell?"

"No; he did not think that," the girl said, or rather shouted, in so wild a manner that Miss Hatchard instinctively fell back a pace or two. "He knew what he was about. He is a thief, a felon, and I am his daughter. Go, go, I say! I am not fit company for you! Go away, go away, I say!" and she literally turned the astonished artist out of the room, seizing her by her shoulder, and then fastened the door upon her.

Miss Hatchard knocked, and shook, and called, but it was all of no avail. Fiametta sat brooding upon her bed, oblivious of her friend's cries or threats.

With the knowledge of her father's weakness and its punishment, the natural force of her affections, so long banked up and turned back, had rushed forth and overthrown all the artificial enclosures that had dammed it up. If she could have died for him, she would have gladly, cheerfully done so. Her passionate love, that had been turned aside and expended upon humanity at large, now for the first time seized upon a special object on which to pour out its fulness. Her woman's nature, so long suppressed, asserted itself at last. She loved her father in his distress as she had never suffered herself to love him before. She trembled in every limb from the force of the passion that swept over her; trembled, too, from a wild, fierce dread of something

deeper, stronger even than her love of him. But this fear she resolutely put away from her, and bent all the powers of her mind and will to seek some means of extricating her father.

The poisoned toy shielded upon her bosom suggested a fatally easy way to her. True, it could only be brought about by a crime. In her ardent love and tenderness, the fiercer because so long suppressed, she would have taken almost any sin upon herself only to free him. In her dwelt that real love of others such as—with all reverence be it said—made One take upon Himself even the indignity of death for others' sakes. She would become a thing accursed that her father might be blameless, his honour unsullied. Death, so she firmly believed, would be better to him than dishonour; a grave preferable to a felon's cell.

Remember that in Fiametta's case her only instructors had been her passions;

her only sense of right and wrong the misery of the oppression of one man upon another. She had no idea of Christianity, save that its ministers were comfortably fed and clothed and housed, while the naked and starving were thrust away to die in the streets. She had never been taught anything that her own great heart had not taught her in the dens of London human refuse ; and her heart's teaching was, that for the oppressed she would bear the yoke, for the suffering she would be guilty, for others' peace she would be a criminal—perhaps, after all, not such an inglorious lesson for a girl's heart to teach her out of the slums of a great city.

Let not any one think that any excuse is being framed for the terrible thought that occurred to her. She was blinded, bewildered ; her mind, under the suddenness of the release and the passion of her love, broke down suddenly. She had no clear consciousness of what she was about,

save that she must at all hazards release her father. All she was conscious of was the burning desire, at any cost to herself, to save him. All sense of proportion was swept away from her. Death was not awful, sin not terrible, only he must be saved.

Being unable to rouse her, Miss Hatchard went downstairs to acquaint David with the latest vagary of their charge.

She found him in his room. He looked worried and anxious ; very different from the fresh-cheeked David who had come up from the country nine months ago. They stayed a little while, talking about Fiametta, and what was best to be done for her ; and while they talked about her, Fiametta herself slipped past the half-open door and out into the street.

Ten minutes afterwards they went upstairs together, and found the attic doors all open, the week's rent to within one-and-sixpence upon the table, and a few

hasty lines to Mrs. Dodds, the landlady, explaining that the beds and chairs and table would make up the required sum, and the week's rent that was required in lieu of a week's notice. That was all ; no word to any one else, no farewell, no sign of where she was going or what she was about to do.

“Good Lord !” said Miss Hatchard, sinking into a chair with horror ; “the girl means suicide !”

David snatched up the paper and put it in his pocket, tossing the coins into Miss Hatchard's lap.

“Don't tell Mrs. Dodds ; don't tell anybody,” he said hoarsely. “She can't have gone far ; I will find her !”

“Oh dear ! oh dear !” cried Miss Hatchard, wringing her hands and running after him ; “and I am sure I may as well go out too, for sit here and think of her, and perhaps in the river, is more than I can do !”

But David did not wait for her ; in fact, he did not heed her. His one thought was to trace out the girl on her way to, as he feared, self-destruction. The river was the first thing he thought of, that natural road to eternity. He knew she would have no scruple in taking the life she held so cheaply ; no fear of future punishment troubled her, for she believed in no future after death. There was only one thought that held a grain of comfort in it for him, as he ran and pushed his way down to the sullen, black stream, and that was that she was too brave to succumb to the first blow of adversity. He could not imagine anything subduing her spirit. She had no fear of death ; was it likely she would stoop to seek it ?

As he reached the embankment, and looked eagerly down its cold and windy pavements, his heart cheered a little. She was not there. He ran down it to Blackfriars Bridge ; and then, not knowing

what better to do, crossed the bridge, and came back by Waterloo, and up the embankment again to Westminster. It was dark night by this time, the myriads of lamps glittered in the cold air, and cast their long lines of reflection upon the water from the bridges. Like a girdle of fallen stars they surrounded the cold, black, rushing river, and David felt thankful in his heart that there was no fog to blurr them, no dimness under cover of which the poor girl might creep down to her destruction.

It was so bright and glittering by the river that he left it at last, feeling that it was useless to remain there ; and then he bent his steps towards those dreadful haunts of poverty and vice that Fiametta had been in the habit of visiting, about Drury Lane and New Compton Street.

Somehow, the longer he walked the more hopeless he felt of finding her. There are so many ways of hiding in

London, he might spend ten years in walking about the streets, and never see the face he sought. Yet there seemed a horrible certainty that one day or other he must find her. He prayed aloud (much to the astonishment of some matrons outside a gin palace, who took him for a street preacher) that the river might hold her that very night if he could not find her at once.

He had walked for some hours, and had come round to Wellington Street. He had no clue to guide him where to go; he could simply wander about the streets and look for her. It was the hour for changing the force, one long line of blue coated, big fellows came up the street, and another detachment came out of the Bow Street police-station, and went away.

As they did so, and deposited one of their number at the corner of Wellington Street and the Strand, a girl came up and spoke to him, a girl in a lilac frock, with

an old black jacket, and a great roll of red-gold hair under a shabby hat. David never ran so fast in his life as he rushed down the street again. It was by the merest chance that he had turned his head that once, but there was no mistaking the gleam of that hair, or the carriage of the small, proud head.

He had her in his arms, regardless of the thoroughfare that they were in, or of her anger, or anything else. For the first time since he was a little boy the tears ran down David's face.

"Let me go!" she said.

He only drew her arm in his, and held her hand so tightly that the pain brought the colour into her face. The policeman looked steadily at them.

"Don't you see you are hurting the young woman?" he said. But David took not the slightest notice of him.

"Come, come," he said, "my dear, come back with me at once."

“No, I will not. You have no right to make me do anything. I will not come. I want to go to my father.”

“You cannot go at this time of night. Trust me, I will take you to him as soon as possible.”

“You can’t get to see prisoners on remand at this time,” said the policeman, to whom Fiametta had been talking. “You had better let your friend take you home, miss.”

“I have no home ; I will not go back,” she said passionately.

David looked up at a hansom cabman, who had been regarding them with looks of interest for some moments. The man understood, and drew his cab up close to them, and before Fiametta well knew what she was about, the policeman and David had got her into the cab, and certain coins of the realm reposed confidently in the policeman’s hand.

“I suppose it’s all right,” said that

worthy to himself, as he watched the cab rattle off. "He looked a good sort, and the girl is a bit touched. Anyhow, the streets is no place for her."

A sudden quietness fell upon Fiametta after she was in the cab. She had struggled at first to get out.

"He may send for you," he said, "and if you are not at home you will not get his message."

"Can he?" she said, stopping suddenly in her efforts to free herself. "Can I get to him soon?" and a wild hope glistened fiercely in her eyes. "The policemen said I could not get to him. I have asked several."

"What did you tell them?"

"That he was in prison for theft."

"My poor dear, you do not understand. It is my fault for explaining things so badly. He is only under remand in the House of Detention. He is not actually in prison at all."

“But he will be sent there?”

“I fear so, for a short time. The magistrate refused bail, and I fear the option of a fine will not be given him. Indeed, I am sure it will not; but we must get a barrister to defend him. I want to talk to you about that to-morrow.”

“There will be no need,” she said, in a strange dreamy voice. Her anger and despair had vanished; there was almost a smile on her face as she bent a little forward, while her clenched hand stole again to her bosom. “No need,” she repeated dreamily.

“What do you mean, dear? There is every need to defend him.”

She raised her fathomless eyes and looked at him. There was a strange exultation lurking in them that he had never seen before. He could not think what she meant. He feared that he had raised a false hope in her of her father's release.

“Do not expect too much, dear,” he said tenderly. “The Museum authorities are determined to push the matter, but possibly the sentence will be very light.”

She laughed, actually laughed; but it was a laugh that filled David with horror and dismay.

“We will go to him to-morrow,” she said. “There will be no need to defend him. A Thorold can defend himself from shame and a felon’s disgrace;” and again she touched her breast. Then giving him her hand as he alighted, she sprang out of the cab and ran away upstairs to her own room.





CHAPTER XI.

THEY could not get her to go to bed that night. Her father might send for her, the poor girl said, and nothing would induce her to undress. Miss Hatchard had come in before them, and was sitting weeping and wringing her hands when the cab drove up to the door. She had taken possession of Fiametta immediately, and would have kept her in her own room, but the girl insisted on going upstairs; and so Miss Hatchard went with her, and lit the fire, and tried to induce her to eat something, but she refused all food, and sat crouched on the floor by the fire the whole night through.

In point of fact, she frightened that

good woman very thoroughly. There was such a fierce and desperate expression in her eyes, blended with such a hopeless despair, that she was many times in the course of the night strongly tempted to call David to come and keep her company in her watch. But her mysterious dislike to have him about the girl at all kept down her desire, and so she sat there, and kept the fire up, and tried to talk now and then, but without getting any response from her charge.

David brought Mrs. Fowler up after breakfast, while Miss Hatchard, quite worn out, went to lie down and refresh herself with a good cry and a sleep. They sat one on each side of the girl and tried to talk to her, but she paid very little attention to them, seeming intent upon some purpose in her mind over which she brooded, and every now and then she pressed her hand upon her bosom.

David noticed this action, and wondered

what it meant. Moreover, she seemed to be listening for something, for at every knock or ring at the door below she would raise her head and listen intently ; then, as no steps came up the attic stairs, she drooped again into brooding despondency.

It was Sunday, so the street was unusually quiet—a damp, heavy Sunday, too, when a yellow fog hung about the streets, and the pavements and houses seemed to exude a sticky and filthy moisture at every pore. The smoke came down into the heavily laden air, and made it still more difficult to breathe, and sky and light and hope seemed all alike blotted out.

In the afternoon, when they were still sitting there with her, and she had shown some signs of getting uneasy and impatient, a loud knock was heard at the front door.

Fiametta started.

“That must be for me,” she said, getting up.

“We shall soon know,” said David, wishing to humour her, “for I will go down and see who it is.”

“Why do you think so, dear?” asked Mrs. Fowler, who found it very hard to think of “Frederick” alone; but David had begged her to stay there, as since Mr. Thorold’s imprisonment both Mrs. Dodds and Sarah Ann had manifested an intense curiosity towards the lonely girl, and he dreaded their scandal-brewing tongues for her sake.

“I know it is,” she said, listening for every sound that came from below. “I have felt that my father would send for me. It is all that he can do now. Death is better than dishonour.”

“Oh, my dear, you don’t think he is dying?” cried Mrs. Fowler in alarm. It was something dreadful to her to hear death spoken of so calmly.

"Hush ! some one is coming," replied Fiametta.

"My dear," said David, going up to her and taking her hand, "a message has come for you. Your father is not very well, and he wishes to see you." David could not find it in his heart to tell her that he was dying.

"I am ready," she said, buttoning on her jacket; and they went downstairs together, and into the cab that the policeman had fetched for them at David's request.

All the way there, he noticed that she kept her right hand clenched upon her breast. It was such a very unusual action for her that it made him uneasy. There was a fixed, set look about her face, and a glitter in her eyes, the expression of a hunted-down wild animal that is brought to bay, but will turn and rend whomsoever touches it.

She only spoke once during the short

drive. The policeman had gone outside with the driver, so David and she were alone.

“You think it noble and right in people to die for their country?” she asked, in a low, strained voice. “My mother’s father and brothers died nobly?”

“Surely,” he answered her, wondering why she asked him such a question, and wishing to comfort her if possible; “surely a patriot’s death is a noble one.”

“It was better they should die than live dishonoured?” she asked again.

“But they were killed in battle, my dear, were they not?”

“Yes, they were; but many of my mother’s ancestors died on the block. They were always on the side of freedom; they preferred death to dishonour.”

“What do you mean, dear?” he asked tenderly, for he could not understand the drift of her thoughts.

She only looked wildly about her, and answered vaguely—

“Death is better than dishonour ;” and then she sank her head upon her breast, and appeared lost in thought.

This little conversation naturally did not tend to allay David’s anxiety about her, and he resolved not to lose sight of her for a moment. When they got to the House of Detention they were told that Mr. Thorold was in the infirmary, and thither they were conducted, after an ineffectual attempt on Fiametta’s part to leave David below.

“I do not want you,” she said to him ; “neither does my father wish to see you. Do you wish to remind him of your charities to him ? ”

“No,” he said ; “but I wish him to feel that you have not come here alone and unprotected.”

“I can take care of myself,” she retorted haughtily.

“Nevertheless, I wish to go with you,” he said quietly; and he laid his hand upon her clenched fist as if to draw it away from her bosom. It was but the briefest touch, but he knew at once that she was keeping something concealed there, under her dress. Had he not felt anything, he would have known it by the sudden deadly pallor that overspread her face.

He looked steadily at her, and her eyes drooped, and she visibly quailed before him. Without another word, she turned and went up the staircase after the person who had come to guide them, David following her.

At the end of a long white-washed room, in which were several beds, some occupied, some empty, there was a screen drawn round one bed. Fiametta did not know its significance, but David did. She only felt that it was some sort of comfort that her meeting with her father could take

place away from curious eyes. She stopped, and waved David and the attendant back with her hand.

“You need come no further,” she said.

The attendant hesitated, but David came forward.

“Let me speak to him, too,” he pleaded.

“Is there nothing sacred from you?” she asked him, bitterly. “May I not even meet my father on his death-bed alone?”

David could not torment her by insisting on being present any longer, for the sake of a mere undefinable dread that he had of her seeing her father alone. He drew back, and she went on round the screen.

The old man was lying back with his eyes closed as she came up to him. She was not surprised to see him looking haggard, white, and wan; he had looked so for years, and her eyes were not experienced enough to note the change

in his wasted features, and the clammy pallor upon his brow. She did not look upon this illness as anything serious. When she had used the word death-bed, it was with a very different significance. She never thought of his dying from the effects of his illness. He looked to her much as he had looked for many years, and she bent over him and kissed him.

He opened his eyes and looked at her.

“Ha! my Fiametta, my little firebrand, so they have let you come to me. I shall soon be all right again. Ah, if only you were your mother, child! She would help me out of this.”

“Father, dear father, I can do as she would have done.”

“You can barely remember her,” he went on, in a hoarse whisper, “my beautiful Fiametta. Child, my heart broke with hers when she drooped and died for her kinsfolk and her country, but I have done my duty by you. The deed is safe,

safe. I was a fool to take it, to think that I could keep it safer than the British Museum could. I shall not see it, but you will have your rights. I can tell my Fiametta that."

"Father, dear father, I know what you mean. Death before dishonour. I have brought you her message, her last message. She gave it to me on her death-bed. Father, on your heart the scar shall be; a touch will do it, for it is poisoned. Matteo Vercelli sent it to my great uncle in his dungeon. Father, quick, quick, before any one comes!"

"Fiametta," said David, suddenly coming round the screen. He had not heard what she said, only caught the quick, eager tone of her whisper, and could bear the suspense no longer, for he knew in himself that all was not well behind that screen. Some subtle sense he knew not of what made him come forward at that instant.

She did not shriek or scream, but turned to a perfectly unnatural hue; a greenish shade seemed to creep over her face. Her eyes dilated and shone with a rage and terror perfectly indescribable. Her lips turned dark, and drew back from her glittering set teeth. As he had entered she had thrust the murderous steel under the clothes; she grasped its velvet handle still, and in that kneeling attitude she seemed frozen, for she did not move another muscle, only knelt there perfectly rigid.

“How do you do, Mr. Thorold?” said David, collecting with a great effort all the calmness he was capable of, but speaking in a trembling voice, nevertheless. He had turned almost as pale as the dying man on the bed, as his eye had caught the gleam of the sharp steel.

“Eh, Everest?” said the old man, feebly. He seemed dazed and confused. “This is my daughter, Everest. She is

like her mother, the last of the Vercelli. They were great people in Italy."

"I hope you are feeling a little better," said David, hoarsely, not able to look again at the kneeling girl. There was a grip of pain about his heart such as he had never felt before.

"She is like her mother," he replied feebly—"very like her mother. I have done my duty by her. The deed, it is all right?"

"Yes, quite right," said David, seating himself on a chair beside the bed, while Fiametta buried her face in the bed-clothes.

"Ah, yes; quite right," he repeated weakly. "I have got the better of them all at last, but it will be over for me soon now."

"We can't get him to take any food," said the attendant, who now came up to the bedside. "Not a bit of anything has he touched since he has been here."

“Food? No, I will not eat felons’ food!” he cried in a shrill whisper, with a touch of his old anger; “it would poison me. A Thorold eat the bread of prisons!”

“But you are not in prison,” said David, and tried to explain that he was only under remand; but he would not hear it.

“It is all the same,” he said, “taken up as if for a paltry theft. It was *my* deed; it belonged to my ancestor, Harvey Thorold. I am even with them all now;” and he lay back exhausted.

“Do try and take a little beef-tea,” said the attendant, offering him a cup, “for the sake of the young lady.”

“No, no,” he said hoarsely.

“Can’t we make him take it?” whispered David.

“It would be no good now, sir,” he answered. “He was in a dying state when he was brought here. He has been

starving for a long time, the doctor says, and his constitution is quite broke up. This wouldn't do him no good if he did take it, but it's my duty to try my best to make him."

He seemed so exhausted by his interview that he lay back in a kind of doze, and David judged it best to take Fiametta away.

"We had better go," he said, bending forward.

She lifted her head defiantly.

"You can go," she said. "I shall stay with my father."

David looked at the attendant.

"It's my orders not to allow visitors to stay beyond their time, miss," he said civilly, in answer to David's look. "We might send for you again later on."

"I will not go."

"I am afraid you must, miss."

"You must, indeed," said David, who was in an agony of apprehension to get

her away, and obtain possession of the murderous weapon he had seen in her hands, and to do it all, if possible, without arousing the man's suspicions. "Come with me for a little while, at least. You can come again to-morrow. You must come, indeed you must;" and he laid his hand upon her arm.

"Very well," she answered. "Let me say good-bye to my father. You can go away," she added angrily.

"I will not leave you," he said, in so firm a voice that she quailed under his eyes again; and she bent over the bed and kissed the old man upon his lips.

"I have brought her message," she whispered. "You will find it under the quilt. Oh, father, father, good-bye, good-bye!"

He moved a little uneasily, and muttered something.

"Fiametta," he said. "Ah, yes; I will

tell her I found it and left it with you. Good-bye, my dear."

She kissed him again, and turned to go; but he had already fallen into a doze, so David would not wake him, and they went down the long room together. As they passed out from behind the screen a change seemed to fall upon the girl. Her eyes brightened, her proud head was raised, her step was more majestic; a conqueror could not have looked more conscious of a victory won than she did going down the infirmary ward and stairs.

"One moment," said David, pausing at the door. "I have forgotten something;" and before the attendant or Fiametta knew what he was about, he had dashed along the room and past the screen. They both followed him as quickly as they could, the man full of official indignation, Fiametta in sudden terror. They met David coming back

again, his face very white, and his right hand in his pocket.

“It’s all right,” he said nervously, and in an excited manner. “I dropped my—my purse,” he added.

The man looked at him suspiciously.

“I will ring for somebody to take you out,” he said, suiting the action to the word. “I don’t leave this place again.”

“As you will,” said David, carelessly; and another attendant appearing at that moment, he and Fiametta went down the stairs together.

He did not look at her, nor she at him; a dreadful understanding was between them that kept their eyes averted from each other. They did not even speak until David had handed her into a cab, and they drove off together. Then she broke the silence.

“Was it true about a purse?” she said, looking straight before her along the foggy, filthy street.

He made no answer. Now that he was sitting beside her, he seemed to feel the awfulness of her crime even more fresh upon him. He turned quite faint and sick, and had to lean back in his corner of the hansom. He was physically unable to tell her that he had the dagger in his pocket, but he believed that she must know that he had taken it.

She on her part could not ask the question. Her mind had become to her as a red-hot, seething mass. Her brain felt as if it were on fire, and fearful and terrible shapes were passing about in the midst of the flames. Even now she had no distinct recollection of what had passed in the infirmary. She knew that she had taken the dagger there, but what she had said to her father had passed from her mind; a glaring, red-hot pain was all that she had strength to know for the present. That remark about the purse had not really been made to David

at all; it was but an effort to disentangle in her mind some of the confused mass of phantasies that filled it. The effort made, she subsided again into vacant, nerveless horror and pain. She said nothing more, but sat with her hands clasped, bending slightly forward and looking out at the fog and rain.

When they came to Harcourt Street, she got out mechanically and walked upstairs into Miss Hatchard's room. In the familiar place, her mind became for the time a little clearer, and she walked into the studio as if she had been a queen.





CHAPTER XII.

“LOR, my dear!” said Miss Hatchard, as Fiametta came in; “well, he ain’t so bad after all, is he?” For the girl’s eyes were bright, and her head held up; she looked a different creature to the brooding, crushed being that had left Harcourt Street but a few hours ago.

“He is better, much better,” she replied, standing in the doorway with her hands crossed before her. “I have not lived in vain, Miss Hatchard.”

“Come and have a cup of tea,” said that lady; “it’s jest drawed. Why, you are talking quite light headed. Where is Mr. Everest?”

“Downstairs.”

“And he had better stay there. Come in, dear.”

“No ; I cannot eat or drink. I—I have something on my hands ;” and she looked at them.

“I’ll get you a drop of hot water. Come in.”

But Fiametta’s only answer was to close the door, and go upstairs to her own room, and neither coaxing or threats could bring her down again. So poor Miss Hatchard was fain to pass another night in the attic with her.

She was even worse this night than she was on the preceding one. Then she had been quiet and brooding, now she was wild and restless. For hours she paced up and down, up and down the rotten, waving floor, with her hands clasped, and with a fierce, quick, eager step, till the little artist felt half crazed herself to watch her, and the trembling floor, and

tottering walls, and twisted roof, seemed to her bewildered eyes to be closing them all in in one hideous madness.

In vain she implored the girl to be quiet, to lie down. Fiametta did not even seem to hear her voice ; but continued her walk up and down, up and down, till Miss Hatchard, unable to bear the strain any longer, subsided into nervous sobbing.

Early in the morning there came a knock, and a ring at the bell ; not a postman's, or a mikman's, or a telegraph boy's, but a loud continuous knock, and a strong pull at the bell, as if the knocker and ringer felt tolerably certain that he had business at that particular house, and no other.

Fiametta stopped in her walk and listened.

"That is the message," she said to Miss Hatchard ; "they have come to tell me that he is dead."

“Don’t think such things, my dear; it ain’t for you at all, I expect. Lor, don’t go down.”

For Fiametta had gone to the door and opened it. There was a sound of feet upon the stairs. She went down to the second-floor landing, and then she heard the door of David’s room open, and his voice asking an eager question.

“Yes, sir,” she heard a strange man’s voice answer; “he died this morning at four o’clock.”

A shudder passed over her, and she turned as white as a lily; while her eyes dilated and shone with a terrible nameless horror.

“Lawks!” said Sarah Ann, who was piloting the policeman upstairs, “my! don’t she feel it orful neither!” and the girl stood staring stupidly at the terror-struck, helpless creature before her.

“His end was very easy, miss,” said the man, as gently as his rough voice

would allow. "At four o'clock this morning, passed like a child, the nurse said."

"Come downstairs," said David, who had rapidly dressed himself and come up the stairs.

"There's the funeral," said the man. "Would the young lady like——"

"Come down, I say. Sarah Ann, go down to your mistress;" and David and the policeman departed.

Miss Hatchard was with Fiametta, and had put her arm round her, and begged her to come into her room and lie down. She did not seem to hear at first; then she looked at her with such piteous despair in her face that the elder woman burst out crying.

"He did not even look at me," the girl said, in tones that went to Miss Hatchard's heart to hear. "What have I really done?"

"Lor, come in, my darling; your head

is almost turned. Come and lie down a bit," sobbed the artist. "Oh, my dear, if you would only cry, it would do you good! Come in;" and quite meekly Fiametta followed her, did as she was bid, even tried to swallow some food, but with that look on her face of the horror that seemed to have fallen with a petrifying power upon her.

She lay down, but she could not keep her eyes shut, though she tried to close them; she had suddenly sunk into the state of a little child, and obeyed Miss Hatchard as if she had been her mother.

It was dreadful to see her lying staring straight up at the ceiling with that blank and hopeless horror. Miss Hatchard could not bear it, and told her to get up and sit in her armchair by the fire, and try to warm herself, for she felt as cold as stone to the touch. She did so in a silent, unquestioning way that

made poor Miss Hatchard cry again, as she remembered the girl's old stubborn, imperious spirit. She sat quite silently for a time, with seemingly no power of motion or speech; then she suddenly said—

“He was my father; he gave me life;” and then she stopped, as if unable to go on with the rest of her speech.

“Yes, dear, your father. We must expect to outlive our fathers, you know. Why, my par died years and years ago. Lor! but I can mind him as if it was yesterday;” and Miss Hatchard wiped her eyes.

“There is something on my hands,” she said again presently, holding her long thin fingers before her. “Do you see it?”

“No, dear; they are quite clean; but I will wash them, if you like.”

“No,” she said, with a shudder; “it will not wash off. It is a stain of red

velvet ; ” and she shivered violently, and cast a frightened glance around the room.

“ Oh dear, dear ! ” thought Miss Hatchard in despair, “ it has come at last. The Lord forgive me for saying what I did the other day, for I never meant it ; and now it has come, and she is out of her mind. ”

“ What red velvet, dear ? ” she asked, not knowing what to say to her.

The girl threw up her hands in horror before her face.

“ No, no ! ” she cried ; “ no, no, no ! You did not see it. None but we three know it, and it is safe with us—safe with us. ” She stopped and stared vacantly before her for some time ; then, looking up into Miss Hatchard’s face, she said piteously, “ But, oh, it was cruel to make me do it ! ”

“ You ain’t done nothin’ ; you have always been a good girl, my dear, ” said

the woman, soothingly. "You ain't got nothin' to reproach yourself with, dear. Lor, what is that?" as a knock came to her door.

"Oh, Miss 'Atchard, it's a gentleman to see Miss Thorold; and as she ain't upstairs, I suppose she's 'ere—or down in the first floor," added the handmaiden maliciously, mindful of David's peremptory address that morning.

"You dare!" cried Miss Hatchard, dashing forward and shaking her fist, not at Sarah Ann's smutty countenance, but in the face of a gentleman dressed as a clergyman, who stood in the doorway, Sarah Ann having discreetly retired in time.

"I—— Ah, beg your pardon," said the gentleman.

"Oh, Lor!" said Miss Hatchard. "Well, I never! But there, I am so flustered as never was. The saucy hussy! I beg your pardon, sir. Do come in."

The clergyman stepped inside. He was a slight man, very neatly dressed in faultless clerical attire of somewhat an old-fashioned sort, for he wore a frock coat, an ordinary high waistcoat, not of "M. B." pattern, a white tie, and he carried a tall hat in his hand. He had grey hair, short and waving at the ends, and a small grey beard and whiskers. He had a rather handsome face, with a certain grave dignity about it, a broad high forehead, and a pair of unusually gentle soft blue eyes. He looked every inch a gentleman and a Christian.

He bowed in a quiet, dignified manner to Miss Hatchard. Fiametta he could not see, for Miss Hatchard's big easel hid her from him.

"Pray excuse my intrusion. My only excuse is, that the servant believed you could give me some information about a young relative of mine—a Miss Thorold."

"Oh, Lor!" cried Miss Hatchard,

wildly. "Well, I never!" and here words failed her.

"I was only yesterday aware that I had such a relation," he explained. "I saw in the *Times* yesterday an account of a most unfortunate poor cousin of mine, of whom I had lost sight for many years; in fact, I believed him dead. Doubtless, as he appears to have lived in this house, you know the sad circumstance to which I refer?"

Miss Hatchard nodded, and he went on—

"I came up to town last night, and found out where he was; but I could not be admitted at that hour. On calling this morning, I hear to my intense regret that he is dead. I got his address from the officials of the place, and came here at once, learning that he had a daughter. I do not wish to intrude upon her grief, poor child, at such an unseasonable time; but if you can convey to her my

earnest sympathy and my sincere desire to be to her all that a kinsman may be at such a time, you will have my deep gratitude for your kindness."

"Oh, Lor! oh, Lor! But who are you?" cried Miss Hatchard, wringing her hands in the wildest excitement.

"My name is James Thorold. The late Mr. Thorold was my cousin."

"Why, mercy on us, you must be the heir!" exclaimed the little woman, in a perfectly wild state of astonishment.

"I was my father's heir, if that is what you mean?" he said, wondering who this extraordinary little person was. "Chaylesford is my property certainly, if that is what you refer to."

"Come here! come here!" cried Miss Hatchard, in her excitement forgetting the respect due to the "cloth," and literally pulling him by that same material round the easel. "Look! there she is. Oh, my dear, your fortune has come at

last!" and, quite overcome by her feelings, the little artist threw herself down, and buried her face in the girl's lap.

Mr. Thorold paused. He was surprised, not to say startled, by the sight of his cousin. He had expected to find some weeping girl. He had thought of his own daughter all the morning, and his tender heart had been sore with pity for the desolate orphan. But, instead of a crushed and gentle girl, he saw before him a woman with a white, haughty face and strange, wild, glittering eyes—eyes that looked to him as if they belonged to some furious wild beast; and there was a lithe fierce energy about her quivering figure as she rose and flung her hand out towards him that made him instinctively compare her to a tigress about to spring. There was passion and scorn in her very finger-tips.

"I want no parsons here," she said, in a cold, hard voice. Her head, with its

waving dead-gold hair, was thrown a little back, her hand and arm outstretched. He could not but admire her beauty, though he saw how she scorned him. "I am poor; I can give you neither money nor food in return for your empty promises of a future world you know nothing about. Go to the rich, and help to pamper them in their sin and idleness, and may the curses of the poor follow you to your grave;" and she clenched her fist, and set her teeth.

Mr. Thorold was fairly taken aback at this very unexpected greeting. He had never seen a woman like this before. He was obliged to sit down for an instant to recover his equanimity.

"Poor thing! her mind is turned by her loss," he thought to himself. He rose, went up to her, and tried to take her hand, but she snatched it away from him.

"My dear, I am your cousin," he said

simply. He scarcely knew what to say to her.

She turned upon him as if he had stung her.

“You have come to see his shame!” she said, in a low, bitter voice, fixing her eyes upon him; “but you are too late. The husband of a Vercelli knew how to defend himself without your niggard help. You are too late for him. Perhaps you thought that as he, my protector, is dead, I, a daughter of your house, might shame you—become a pauper, perhaps, and lie in one of your charitable institutions called workhouses. You need not fear for her. You need not be afraid for her. She will never seek others’ or your charity; she knows how to help herself. She will not rob the poor, nor live upon the toils of others; and she will, at least, know how to die. You may go.”

“Oh, my dear, my dear!” cried Miss

Hatchard, with difficulty finding her voice in her sobs of delight; "oh, my dear, for goodness gracious' sake, don't talk like that!" and she flung her arms round the girl's waist.

Fiametta looked contemptuously down at her.

"Perhaps you wished to offer me money," she said to Mr. Thorold, who was too surprised at his very unexpected reception to find words come very readily to him.

"I simply came, my dear, as your cousin, to offer you my home. You are my nearest known relation out of my own household;" and he came closer to her and held out his hand.

"Oh, Lor! oh, Lor! Fiametta, take it," screamed Miss Hatchard, wildly. "Your own cousin. Oh, I never was so glad of anything in all my life!"

Fiametta walked proudly to the window and threw it open. A confused noise of

quarrelling women, shrieking children, and the harsh and discordant sounds of costermongers, street itinerants, and all the clamour of a low and noisy street were wafted in.

“These are my brothers and sisters,” she said, indicating with her hand the crowd in the street gathered round the quarrelling women. “Their home is my home, their sorrows my sorrows. I will not leave them to live with you on what has been wrung from their blood and lives. Grind down the poor for yourself, take for your inheritance the portion of thousands, but leave me free from the innocent blood that stains your hands.”

As she finished she looked wildly about her, and then held her own white, right hand shudderingly before her face, as if dreading to find some stain upon it too.

“Don’t hark to her ; oh, don’t take no notice !” cried Miss Hatchard, laying her hand upon the visitor’s sleeve, while

Fiametta gazed in a kind of rapt horror upon her hands. She seemed to have forgotten all about her visitor. "She is a bit light-headed like; she don't know what she is saying!" She tried to whisper the latter part of her speech, but the words were audible all over the room.

"You lie!" said the girl, coming up behind her and seizing her by the shoulders and drawing her away. "I do know what I am saying. I tell you," she went on, addressing her cousin, "to take your wealth away. I will have none of it. Of my own free will I will never so much as touch a crust of your bread. I hold no ties of kinship save the sacred bond of humanity. You are no more to me than those people out in the street. Carry your kinship to them: they need it; I do not."

"Don't take no notice! oh, don't take no notice!" screamed Miss Hatchard, again pulling at his sleeve.

“Poor child!” was all he said; “poor child!” But there was such sorrow and pity in his voice that even Fiametta turned her head towards him, and there was silence for a moment. The hard fierce look died out of her eyes, and a sudden blankness came over them. She seemed again to become unconscious of all around her.

“I have two daughters,” he said at last, hoping to interest her in spite of herself, “girls like yourself, my dear.” He could hardly suppress a shudder as he thought of their coming into contact with this wild, passionate creature—“They will be delighted to welcome you as one of themselves.”

“Oh, bless you, take her, take her!” screamed Miss Hatchard, still sobbing and tugging at his sleeve.

He touched Fiametta upon her shoulder, for she did not pay any attention to his words.

“Come home with me,” he said, “and be to me as one of my own girls.”

She looked up in a dazed wild way into his face.

“I will be a curse *for* others,” she said, “but I will never be a curse *to* them.” Then pausing for a moment, as if to collect her scattered thoughts, “There is no disgrace resting upon him, for now it can never be proved.”

He did not understand her.

“Come with me, my dear,” he said, “and we will all try and make you happy.”

It was unfortunate that he used the last word, for it quickly roused all her passions. She flung his hand from her arm, as if it had stung her.

“I am not a ghoul,” she cried fiercely, while that strange glitter shone in her eyes again. “I will not purchase my happiness by feeding on the blood of the poor. Every grain of your wealth is

bought by the toil and misery of others. You may prey upon them in your cowardice, if you will, I will not. Go, I say go!" she cried, raising her voice, "go, go down to the grave with the curses of millions upon your head, but leave me at least guiltless of this crime. Go, go, at once, I say!" And she turned in a perfect fury upon him, as if she would herself have thrust him out of the room.

Mr. Thorold paused, uncertain what to do. In her present state of mind it was useless to talk to her, yet he could not bear to leave her. Miss Hatchard came to his assistance.

"Oh, don't mind her, don't mind nothing!" cried the little artist, half-distracted. "There, go away now; but oh, Lor, come back again; don't forsake her. Oh, do come back again!"

"Go," repeated Fiametta, pointing angrily at the door.

“ I will come again,” he said to Miss Hatchard. “ My dear—— ” making a last effort to get Fiametta to listen to him. But she only repeated her angry motion of dismissal, and sad and sore at heart, he went silently out of the room. Miss Hatchard would have followed him, but Fiametta caught her fiercely by the shoulders.

“ You shall not go,” she said. “ I will not have you follow him ; ” and she listened until she heard the front door shut, and then her hands loosed their hold.

“ There ! ” cried the artist, indignantly, “ now you have gone and done a pretty thing for yourself. Lor, what’s come to the girl now ? ” For Fiametta was standing like a statue in the middle of the room, looking at her right hand. All trace of her late passion had calmed down, and there was a dull, fixed blank look upon her face.

“There is a stain there,” she said shudderingly, and with white lips—“red velvet ;” and she submitted to be led to the easy-chair and seated by the fire.





CHAPTER XIII.

AND where was David? Miss Hatchard asked herself that question over and over again, as the evening hours drew on and no David appeared. It was not like him to desert the girl whom he had befriended in her great trouble, yet he did not come near her, had not so much as spoken to her since he had brought her back last night in the cab. He had come to the door of the studio to ask after her before going out in the morning; but he had not come in, or even asked to do so, and there was a haggard, sleepless look upon him, as if some great horror had kept him awake all night. Miss Hatchard was

struck by the unusual expression of his face, struck, too, by his keeping his hand clenched upon his breast, much in the same way that Fiametta had kept hers the night before ; but she did not know then, and never did know, the velvet-sheathed secret that both hid upon their hearts in the selfsame manner.

David had the dagger in the inner pocket of his coat. He was afraid to part with it for an instant, almost afraid to take his hand away from it, lest it should fall out, and be discovered, and lead to inquiries being made. He was almost as nervous over it as if the intended murder had really been committed. Perhaps it was not wonderful that his head was a little thrown off its balance by the discovery he had made. Fiametta seemed suddenly to be removed by the width of a great bottomless chasm away from him. He could not cross to her, nor she to him ; no words between

them could do it. Something—he did not know what—seemed to hold him back, as if with an iron band about his heart, a band that he was powerless to break, yet that tortured him with a pain he had never known before. He did not know that he loved her so much that he could forgive even this act of hers, and that the pain arose from his being unable even to himself to acknowledge this. He felt the horror of it thick upon him, and never knew that his love was deeper even than the trembling, deepening shadow that was about him. He was afraid to go near her, and it seemed impossible to stay away.

In this frame of mind he left for his office. He had been away nearly all day on Saturday, so was obliged to present himself there on Monday; but the amount of work he did made no very great show there. Indeed, he hardly seemed to know what he was about, so keen was the

pain within him, and he had a fearful, sickening dread of what the future might bring forth.

He was sitting thinking of his last interview with Fiametta, and recalling the wild look of triumph in her eyes with a shudder, when a telegram was put into his hands. It was from his mother, and contained but the words—

“Come at once; your uncle is very ill.”

The suddenness of the blow roused David at once. For one terrible moment he believed that the old man was dead. But a short reflection soon showed him that if such had been the case, his mother would have had no hesitation in saying so. Her telegram was curt, even to cruelty, as it was. She might as well have softened her words a little, or said more, as the circumstances required. Mr. Burney might be dying, or only suffering from some slight illness or accident; the same

shilling's worth might have told him all about it.

One thing only was certain—that he must go at once. There was no power that David was conscious of that could keep him from his uncle's bedside if he had the strength of body to get there. He applied for a few days' leave instantly, as a matter of form. He would have gone, whether they had been granted or not. As it was, his request was allowed at once. There was no time to lose; he would only just be able to catch the afternoon train down to Broodleigh. He borrowed a couple of sovereigns from a comrade in his office, for the drains upon his purse lately had well-nigh emptied it, and, having despatched telegrams to Miss Hatchard and Mr. Fowler, to account for his absence, and to beg the latter to make such arrangements as were necessary for Mr. Thorold's funeral, he went off in a cab to Paddington.

The suddenness of the news about his uncle for the moment drove the thought of Fiametta from his mind, but not the pain from about his heart, that tightened more and more as the shrieking train bore him farther and farther away from her. As the train sped on in the dull twilight beside the sodden meadows, and later on he saw the sullen waste of inky floods spread over what had once been the flowering fields of Somersetshire, it seemed to him as if he saw an image of his own life. Death and desolation, with a great horror of crime, seemed rushing over him, as the waters covered the landscape. His uncle, the dearest friend of his life, was dying; the blackness of a great sin was upon the girl whom he had believed to be as pure as the sky; his own life seemed made up of failures. All his learning and his wisdom in ancient lore seemed to him at that time but as a useless, empty conceit, that he would

willingly have bartered for only the assurance that he would find his uncle alive when he reached him ; for he felt quite sure that his mother's curt telegram meant the worst news that she could send him. His life seemed to him to have been passed in dreams, and now for the first time the reality of things terrible around him was forced in upon him.

He had never known any sorrow until now, and its sting was so sore and sharp upon him that, manlike, he turned his thoughts in whatever direction any comfort might be found. A woman would have hugged her griefs, but David was anxious to escape from them. He felt very friendless and alone. His mother would not help him in any way ; she never had. Of his friends, Miss Hatchard seemed unaccountably alienated from him ; Fowler was married and happy, and had no need of him ; of Fanny, Fanny only, could he be sure. He would find

her as he had left her; he always did find her as he had left her. Surely in this world of change there is a certain comfort in being able to have that certainty about any one. Fanny would be always the same to him; nothing would move her.

He tried to think about her as they went plunging on into the darkness, with the lapping of the waters for miles beside them, but his thoughts kept coming back, with a restless persistency, to the wild, white face that had been in the prison infirmary with him, and to the possible changes that he might find in the loved old face at home. But he kept pulling himself back to Fanny, until, before he got to Broodleigh station, he quite expected to see her in the pony carriage waiting for him. He looked out of the window at the black country outside, and thought he should like to have her kind face beside him when he first

heard the news, whatever it might be, about his uncle.

It was nearly nine when he got to Broodleigh station. He looked anxiously along the platform, but no Fanny was there. He went through the station, and at the back he found the pony carriage and a man.

“Well, Rogers, how is my uncle?” he asked, as he got in, his hands and feet numb with the cold.

The man shook his head.

“’E an’t no better,” he said.

“What is the matter? Is he very ill?”

“Eas, ill eneugh; e’ve ’ad a vit.”

“What sort of fit?”

“What they du call peralasy,” said the man. “Vell down, zudd’n like. Struck mun all one side, I du think.”

David took the reins out of the man’s hands, and lashed his mother’s pony as that animal had never been lashed before,

and in a very short time they were in the narrow lane that led to the Rectory.

Somebody must have been on the look-out for them, for the hall door was flung open before they stopped ; and on David's jumping down and going in, he found Fanny in the hall.

"How do you do, David ? We were sure you would come to-night."

"How is he ?" asked David, holding her hand, and looking earnestly at her.

Fanny's eyes fell under the look, and really they need have done nothing of the kind, for he was thinking of his uncle to the utter exclusion of every one else, and all his earnestness was about him.

"He seems a little better," she said, with her eyes still down.

David pressed her hands, pressed them hard. He could not bear to ask the question that was on his lips. Poor Fanny only felt the pressure of his hands,

and never guessed at the suspense and pain of mind that caused it.

“Is there—is there,” he said at last—
“oh, Fanny, is there any hope?” and he gazed anxiously into her eyes.

In justice to Fanny, it must here be said that she had no idea how seriously ill old Mr. Burney was. Mrs. Everest, with that natural dislike to let anything occur without her intervention, had “managed” so that Fanny should not be told how alarming was the blow that had fallen on the family. It was all that Mrs. Everest could do in the way of fashioning events in the present instance, so she did it. Fanny, therefore, was under the impression that sending for David was only an amiable weakness on the part of Mr. Burney, and she was more than half inclined to think that if David had not gone away so suddenly, this illness might never have happened, for the old man had felt the younger

one's departure very much. It was not due to heartlessness, therefore, that Fanny thought that David's looks and speeches were more directed towards herself than they were. Had she known that her kind old guardian was lying in the very shadow of death, she would have been deeply and genuinely distressed. As it was, pleasure at seeing David had well-nigh eclipsed for the moment all thought of his uncle.

"Dear Fanny," David repeated, "is there any hope?"

What could David mean? Why did he look at her so fixedly and anxiously? Why had he gone away so suddenly? And, above all, why did he come back and talk of hope? At this juncture Mrs. Everest appeared.

"So you are come, David. I hardly knew whether to expect you or not; but Fanny thought you would come."

"Fanny is always right," said David,

kindly ; for Fanny had blushed and looked distressed. "Of course I came at once. How is he now, mother ?"

"Come and see him," said Mrs. Everest, moving towards the stairs. "Fanny dear, will you order some supper for David ? She does not know," she added, in a lower tone, as they reached the landing at the top of the stairs. "I thought it best not to tell her ; there was no necessity for her to know."

"Mother, is there really no chance ?" and David's face blanched and his voice trembled.

Mrs. Everest saw his distress, and, strange to say, it hardened her. She felt instinctively that David would care less for her decease than for that of her brother. Women, even mothers, are jealous over the love of their male relatives. It was a sore trial to Mrs. Everest that her boy loved her brother better than herself.

"I don't know about *chances*," she

said ; “ we are in the hands of a just and dispensing Providence. How you can talk in that heathenish way, I don’t know, David.”

“ I mean—oh, mother, tell me—is there no hope ? ”

“ No hope, David ! and you have been brought up in a Christian family. We are in the hands of the Lord, who will do as He thinks fit with his weak and unworthy vessels. As clay in the hands of the potter, so are we in the Lord’s hands. Think of Saul who rebelled against the hand of the Lord, and submit.” And with this apposite and comforting reflection she ushered him into his uncle’s room.

Mr. Burney was lying motionless on his bed. One side of him was perfectly and hopelessly paralyzed. He might linger on for a few months in a state of half-death, half-life, or he might die within a few days, almost a few hours.

Since the stroke had fallen on him, he had seemed conscious of those around him, but he had dozed a good deal, or rather had lain in a sort of stupor. In all his waking moments he had asked for David. To see him seemed the one thought or desire of the old man's life.

"You think more about David than you do about your immortal soul," Mrs. Everest had said to him that afternoon, when he had dozed and woke and asked if David was come, a dozen times or more.

"I don't know, my dear," he said feebly. "I have tried to do my duty; but I want to see my lad, I want my boy again."

"Your duty!" said Mrs. Everest, solemnly. "Oh, Theophilus, and you a clergyman, to talk upon your death-bed of your duty and not of your need of grace and the Blood of Redemption! Oh, Theophilus, let me pray for you!"

“Do, my dear,” he said feebly. “Will you say one of the psalms for me?”

“Put not your trust in forms,” said Mrs. Everest. “Theophilus, let me say a few words.”

“Thank you, Charlotte. You mean well, I am sure, but I have been so long used to the Church’s ways, I don’t think I could follow any other words now. A psalm, please; any psalm you like.” And in a stony voice Mrs. Everest began at the beginning of the Psalter, and was going straight on with it when David arrived. Old Mr. Burney had fallen asleep under the poetry of the prophet, but he woke up when his boy came into the room.

“My dear lad, my dear lad!” he said, and he tried to stretch out his feeble hand towards the idol of his life.

“Oh, Uncle Theo, dear old Uncle Theo!” was all David could say, and he

knelt beside the bed and buried his face on the old man's shoulder.

"My dear lad, my dear lad!" the old man said, while a beautiful smile came into his dimmed eyes, and tried to play about his poor stiffened mouth, "*Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum, in pace!*"

"Uncle Theo, dear Uncle Theo!" was all the younger man could say.

They stayed quite quiet, David clasping the old man's hand, and the dim eyes feasting on his much-loved face. They understood each other too well to talk at such a time, and they both knew that the end was drawing near.

"Davie," said Mr. Burney at last, in his muffled indistinct voice, "Davie, I should like to know what you have settled about the Gallican Sacramentary?"







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